

Not Less of Love

by *LiteraryBeauty*

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Part One of Six

Chapter 1 of 6

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Not less of love, but expanding

Of love beyond desire, and so liberation

From the future as well as the past.

...T. S. Eliot

Part I

Eighth fucking year.

It would almost be laughable if it weren't *sopitiful*.

Harry Potter, afraid to enter the real world. Of course, he wouldn't say it out loud...hell, this was the first time he'd even admitted it himself. But it was true.

When Hermione had said she was going back to Hogwarts to get her NEWTs...even though McGonagall said it wasn't necessary and that for most, a make-up course was the only necessity...Harry had looked to Ron and laughed.

Stupid Ron. Not picking up on the obvious best mate cues.

His so-called best mate had stared at his *other* so-called best mate with bloody *stars* in his eyes.

"Good idea," Ron had said as if it hadn't been a mere week before that they'd been discussing applying for Auror training.

Arseholes, the lot of them. He hadn't been able to convince a *single* one of his friends to continue with their real lives; everyone had claimed that getting the best possible NEWTs was the only way to go on. Harry had even tried to convince Ron that it would be more difficult trying to get a job once they finished school because they would be doing so against the seventh years...twice as many students trying to find jobs at the same time.

Ron had just got that dreamy look in his eye, obviously picturing fireside snogging with Hermione. Prat.

Of course Harry could have gone on alone. It even made sense. He didn't want to go back to Hogwarts, as he had no desire to learn; he just wanted his life to start.

But he was scared. And not a small part of him, either. Not so much scared of having to find a job or live on his own...those things he could handle...but what if he was *wrong*? What if everyone else came out of Hogwarts with a sense of self, a satisfaction he'd never been able to gain from schooling? What if they were all closer and better for the experience? What if they didn't need him anymore?

Harry shook his head...he knew he was being ridiculous. *Need* him. They didn't need him now! They wanted him around, sure. But the war was over. There was nothing left to fight for. There was no need for a hero and no need for Harry Potter.

With a start, Harry suddenly realised the crux of his problem. If he went back to Hogwarts, there would be nothing *to* do. He'd be a normal student for the first time. Nothing to fight, nothing to vanquish, just a normal boy. No pressure, no trying to fit into moulds made before he'd even known he was a wizard. Wasn't that what he'd always wanted?

But if he became an Auror, there'd be plenty to do. He'd be needed, helpful. He'd save lives and capture bad guys.

Didn't he want a break? Didn't he *deserve* one?

Harry had no idea why he was contemplating all this now. After all, he was already back in Hogwarts, eighth fucking year.

It was, however, better than staring at Malfoy's stupid face. King of the fucking Slytherins...what a short memory that house had. Malfoy was currently eating his breakfast with a disinterested air, as if he didn't care whether he ever ate again. What a pompous arse.

Becoming aware that he was glaring...and without provocation except that Malfoy was clearly an idiot...Harry crossed his arms over his chest and turned his glare to Ron, instead.

It was an embarrassingly long time before Ron noticed, and it was probably only because Hermione was nudging him and jerking her head toward Harry. Harry levelled Hermione with the glare for a moment before giving it back to Ron.

"Er... what's up, Harry?"

"Like you don't know," he snapped. Then he immediately felt bad and relinquished his defensive position, leaning his elbows on the table and propping his head on his hands. "Can you believe Malfoy came back?"

All three turned their heads toward the Slytherin in question, who noticed...why hadn't he noticed Harry's continued staring, then? Probably had selective staring radar...and gave them a sneer and a quirked eyebrow. Arse.

"Where else would he go?" Hermione asked when they turned back to face each other.

"Oh, I don't know, how about his gigantic manor filled with riches and diamonds and prize poodles and shite?"

Even Ron looked askance at Harry for that. "Poodles?"

Harry shrugged. Not his best. "Still, it's weird that he's here."

"I don't think so," Hermione said, always the devil's advocate...and never had that phrase seemed more accurate than when she defended Malfoy. "He's a student, he was exonerated in court thanks, in part, to *your* testimony, and he deserves a second chance."

Harry glanced over at the Slytherin table again. Malfoy's head was down, but his entire body was oddly stiff, as if he was waiting for something to happen.

"Hey, Hermione," Harry whispered, leaning over the table. "Does Malfoy look different to you?"

Hermione took a look. "Er, in what way?"

"I can't place it. Less angry? Or did he get, you know, taller or something?"

Ron and Hermione were both looking at him strangely, but Harry shrugged it off. It was probably just having his freedom that made Malfoy look different. Not happy, just... sure.

"Maybe a little tall...oi, Finnegan, watch it!"

Harry cried out and jumped up as someone fell hard against him, an elbow jolting his ribs and pumpkin juice spilling over the back of his robes.

Seamus corrected his stumble, holding up both hands in defence and dropping his empty glass at the same time.

"Sorry, mate!" he cried. "Got caught up in Ron's robe. No harm, just let me..." He pulled out his wand.

Harry only had a moment to turn before he was slammed against the tabletop. His already messy robes were likely beyond repair, having become intimately acquainted...most tragically...with his treacle tart.

"What the fuck are you doing?" a voice behind Harry hissed at Seamus. Harry struggled to get up, but a hand between his shoulder blades kept him down.

"What the fuck are *you* doing, Malfoy?" Ron cried, pulling his wand on the person pinning Harry.

"Just an accident," Seamus said quickly.

Harry saw the new Defence Against the Dark Arts professor rise from his seat and approach them. Harry hadn't met the man, but even Kingsley Shacklebolt had had good things to say about him. Though sideways...to Harry...it was obvious he was fit and formidable. His thick, dark blond brow was drawn as he eyed the kerfuffle.

"Mr. Malfoy, I presume?" the professor said in a light voice that contradicted his demeanour.

Malfoy grunted in response, which Harry thought was rather odd. He tried to lever himself off the table, but the hand holding him seemed preternaturally strong, and he couldn't reach his wand.

"If you please, let Mr. Potter up from the table. There seems to be a misunderstanding."

In the interim, during which Harry assumed Malfoy was plotting how to get out unscathed, Harry realised the entire Great Hall was silent and all eyes were on them. He looked up to see Hermione staring between Malfoy and the professor.

"Any time!" Harry snapped, not appreciating the position or the lack of help from the professor.

Malfoy's hand finally let up, and Harry stood up quickly, whirling to face him. "What is your problem? Can't figure out how to play nice with others...oh, wait, that's something your *parents* would have taught you."

Knowing that Malfoy's father was in prison and his mother under house arrest, Harry knew the comment would hit home. But he regretted the jibe as soon as he saw Malfoy's face. It didn't crumble or even so much as twitch. But his eyes went strangely hollow, and it was as if he looked right through Harry. Malfoy blinked once and the look was gone, replaced with the more familiar derision.

"Fuck you, Potter."

"Now, now," the professor tutted, ushering Malfoy from the hall.

Harry grabbed his books...splattered with treacle tart...and looked up at the head table. McGonagall looked confused, but only for a moment. When she met Harry's eyes, she gave a disapproving frown as if *he'd* done something wrong.

"What *happened?*?" Harry demanded as the three walked toward Potions class.

"Well, you were there, you saw..."

"Actually, Ron, all I really saw was my pudding get demolished. Care to fill me in on the *other* details?"

Hermione obliged. "Seamus stumbled and spilled his drink on you and Ron." As an afterthought, Hermione spelled away the mess on Harry's robes, leaving only a faint smell of treacle, which Harry didn't altogether mind. "Then suddenly Malfoy was there."

"Suddenly?" Harry asked.

"Yeah, Harry, I didn't even see him get up and then he was there," Ron confirmed.

"And then he had his wand on Seamus and had you against the table. Without any real effort, even...no offense, Harry."

"None taken," he grumbled. So much for his reputation.

"Then Professor Sturn came over and took Malfoy away. That's it."

"Why would Malfoy pull his wand on *Seamus?*?" Harry wondered aloud. They entered the Potions classroom, with more than a little unease. It was almost easy to imagine Snape barging in and demanding silence.

Taking seats near the front for Hermione, Ron and Harry shared a table and began unloading their supplies.

"Maybe he didn't like the way Seamus wasted his drink."

"Yeah, Malfoy seems like the type to care about wastage." Harry shook his head. He didn't like not knowing what was happening. How dare Malfoy just push him around like that for *no* reason? And why hadn't anyone stopped him?

"Ron..." Harry paused. What was he missing? "Why didn't you, you know, pull Malfoy off of me?"

For a moment, Ron looked confused. "I dunno. It was weird, like I really couldn't..." He trailed off for a moment, but then said, "I guess it all just happened so fast."

Deciding to just write it off as a freak occurrence, Harry changed the subject to girls and let Ron run away with it.

The classroom door opened and Slughorn walked in, giving Harry a hefty pat on the shoulder on his way to the front of the class. With Snape-like efficiency, he wrote directions on the board and clapped his hands for them to get started. Apparently there wasn't to be even a day of catch-up. Harry had been hoping for an easy first week.

Halfway through a rather simple fracture tincture, the door opened once again, slamming against the wall and startling Ron so much that he dropped his beetle eyes.

Malfoy strode into the room and took the only empty seat...the one beside Hermione. The Slytherins hissed but Malfoy just glared around the room until his eyes fell on Harry.

Harry wanted to demand who the hell Malfoy thought he was, barging into Potions in the middle of class, but he didn't want to lose points on the first day if Slughorn decided to dock him for talking out of turn...though the professor certainly didn't make a move to chastise Malfoy. Harry contented himself with glaring back.

The noise level returned to normal and Ron dumped in his handful of gritty beetle eyes. Harry looked away from Malfoy to grab up the ladle and stir. When he looked back, Malfoy was staring at his book. He didn't once offer to help Hermione with the potion, not even to put away the ingredients at the end. Harry hoped Slughorn had noticed and wouldn't give him a completed mark.

When Slughorn dismissed the class, Malfoy shot from his seat and was out of the room before most people had even risen from their seats.

Without thinking, Harry handed the completed tincture to Ron and made an excuse about getting to his next class early. He left the Potions classroom just in time to see a shock of pale hair turn the corner. Running after Malfoy, Harry didn't even bother asking himself what the hell he was doing. He had been chasing Malfoy for so long that he'd become quite adept at ignoring that little voice that asked him if he was mental.

Around the corner, Harry stopped when he saw Malfoy leaning against the wall, bent double as if he'd run a marathon. There were a few students walking past, but no one took any note of Malfoy, who ran a hand through his hair and seemed to rally himself.

"Malfoy!" Harry shouted as he straightened and looked ready to walk away. Harry closed the distance between them, but stayed far enough away that he felt safe. His hand was on his wand, and he knew Malfoy noticed.

"What do you want?" Malfoy's voice was wary, and he looked behind Harry as if afraid that Harry had back-up waiting.

"What was that about earlier, in the Great Hall? What's your problem?"

Malfoy rolled his eyes. "I was walking by and that Irish git spilled some of his drink on me. You were already covered in it, and I didn't want it getting on my robes. They're couture, you know."

"You weren't walking by, though. You were sitting down just seconds before."

Malfoy stepped away from the wall and closer to Harry. "Oh, keeping an eye on me, were you?"

"It's proved necessary before," Harry said darkly, looking around to make sure the conversation was still private.

For a moment, Harry thought he saw real regret on Malfoy's features, but it shifted quickly...probably indigestion.

"Listen, Potter. Things are different now, okay? I get it. You won. You're the hero; I'm the villain. I don't care about all that. I've got enough to think about without trying to maintain this little war. So consider this my surrender."

Harry wasn't sure why he liked the sound of that so much. The idea of Malfoy with a white flag made his stomach squirm. "I don't want to fight, either," Harry admitted. "But I don't want you pushing me around just because you've gained a few inches."

Malfoy smirked and Harry flushed...with anger.

"Noticed, have you? Anything else strike you as... odd?"

For a long, strange moment, Malfoy seemed to concentrate on something. His eyes narrowed and his fingers fanned out. Harry looked around to see if Malfoy was trying some sort of wandless magic, but he couldn't see anything different.

He *did* notice, however, that the students walking past had all stopped to watch them.

"Er... Did you do something to me?" Harry patted himself down, checking his hair and glasses.

Malfoy seemed to shrink a little. He took a step back, and when he did, the students started to move again. It was almost as though Malfoy had paused the entire hallway.

"Did you not...?" Malfoy trailed off, looking confused.

Harry had had enough. "Whatever. Listen, Malfoy. Just stay away from me and my friends and we'll get along just fine. And don't try any more of that crazy slow-motion stuff, either. You looked like a right ponce."

Malfoy sneered, but it was weak, and Harry walked away, triumphant.

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"Yeah, and everyone just stared at us. And then he relaxed and they went back to normal."

"That's very strange," Hermione said. But she was looking at her Transfiguration text and not at Harry.

"He was probably just making a stupid face, and you didn't notice because you've seen it so much that it didn't look very stupid to you."

"Ron, saying things like that is why people think you're not very bright," Harry said with a smile. "Malfoy's face is always stupid."

They laughed, Hermione rolled her eyes, and everything was normal.

Still, Harry wondered what Malfoy had wanted him to see when he'd asked if anything was odd. The truth was, everything Malfoy did lately was odd, and Harry didn't like it. He'd figure it out one way or another.

It was good to have a project, Hermione always said. And Harry *had* worried about eighth year being boring.

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For the next week, Harry kept a very close eye on Malfoy. Nothing else out of the ordinary happened, however. Harry was glad for that, of course. He didn't want Malfoy pushing him into food or putting people on pause.

Harry just wanted to know what was going *on*.

To make matters worse, it was turning into a repeat of sixth year, with Hermione and Ron ignoring Harry's concerns. It didn't seem to matter that he'd been *right* the last time...Malfoy *had* been up to something.

Now, though, except for generally being a prat, Malfoy wasn't giving Harry anything to work with.

Only once had Malfoy said anything to Harry since the odd confrontation after Potions. Harry'd been walking to lunch with Neville, talking about their herbology project, and Malfoy had been leaving the Great Hall. Malfoy had slammed his shoulder into Neville, who stumbled and almost fell. Harry had been expecting something and quickly helped Neville regain his balance.

"What now?" Harry'd asked in a tired voice.

"Nothing to do with you, Potter," Malfoy had said, almost snarling. He'd turned to Neville, snapping, "Watch yourself, Longbottom."

Malfoy had stridden away, leaving Harry and Neville confounded as to what had provoked the move. Not that Malfoy needed provocation; he was just a berk.

Despite not speaking to Harry, Malfoy seemed to do his fair share of watching. Harry was starting to feel a little paranoid with how often he caught Malfoy staring at him. It was unnerving, to say the least...and annoying because Ron and Hermione both claimed to not have noticed.

Now Harry was sitting in the Defence Against the Dark Arts classroom. No one else was there; Harry'd arrived quite early, wanting to read up on the wand movements of the spells they were practising that day. The syllabus contained a lot of what Harry had been forced to learn during the year they'd been searching for Horcruxes, but there were methods he'd never even heard of.

During the last class, Professor Sturn had treated Harry like any other student, which he appreciated, until the professor had given him a detention for talking to Ron. He'd known how to cast the spell and hadn't seen the point in pretending to listen. Sturn hadn't agreed, and Harry had written lines on his second day back to class.

Just as Harry heaved a sigh, the door opened. Turning automatically, Harry locked eyes with Malfoy, who looked paler than usual. After an interminable amount of eye contact, Harry turned back to his book. The door closed.

Harry waited for Malfoy to take a seat, but there was no sound of movement, and when Harry turned to look, Malfoy was gone.

"That's more like it," he muttered to himself. It was better that Malfoy just keep his distance. Still, Harry didn't like being the reason a person couldn't be in a room. He'd thought he and Malfoy had agreed to end the animosity...could Malfoy only do that by staying away completely?

After a moment, the fact that Malfoy couldn't be in the same room as him really started to get to Harry. Was Malfoy *afraid* of him? Was he worried one of them would be hurt? Did he think he was doing Harry a favour with this dramatic measure?

Before he knew it, Harry was opening the door and looking around. Just as after Potions, Malfoy had his back to the wall and was leaning over, elbows on his knees.

"Are you all right?" Harry asked. He didn't approach...he wasn't sure if Malfoy was sick or dangerous or about to go all weird on him again.

"Fine," Malfoy said through gritted teeth. He looked up and gave what he might have thought was a reassuring smile but was really just a twisted grimace and not the least bit convincing.

"You look pretty bad, Malfoy. Maybe you should go see Pomfrey..."

"And what do you care, anyway?" Malfoy demanded, rearing up and striding closer.

Harry held up his hands, warding Malfoy off. "I don't," he said. "But I wouldn't think it'd be good for your reputation to pass out on the floor, you know?"

"The idea that you care about my reputation is laughable." Malfoy shook his head.

Now that he was closer, Harry could see more small changes in him. Malfoy's hair looked a little lankier, his eyelids were drooping like sleep was just a fond memory, and his hands were twitching strangely. "Yeah, you should definitely see someone."

Harry turned to re-enter the classroom, but Malfoy grabbed his arm and turned him. For a long moment, nothing was said. Harry waited for an explanation, but when none seemed forthcoming, he tried to pull away.

Malfoy held tight.

"Listen, this is getting really fucking creepy..."

"Thanks for your concern, Potter," Malfoy said, sarcasm curling from his lips. "But I've got this under control."

Still, he didn't let go of Harry until Harry jerked his arm away. Malfoy's grip had been tight enough to bruise, and he rubbed the soreness away. "Somehow I doubt that."

"Just go." Malfoy looked away.

Something seemed very wrong with the entire picture. "What..."

"Go!" Malfoy roared, falling back against the wall and glaring at Harry.

"Oh, fuck you," Harry snapped, tired and confused by Malfoy's mercurial temperament. He walked back into the DADA room, slamming the door behind him.

It was an easy class. They learned about defensive fire and water spells.

Malfoy seemed to sleep at his desk. Harry got lines again.

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"Wow, this is awkward." Harry tried to laugh away the silence, but it only seemed to make things worse.

"You're sure?" Ron asked, hope all too apparent in his voice. Hope that Harry *wasn't* sure.

"Ron! Of course Harry's sure. He wouldn't have said anything, otherwise."

"I think it's great, Harry," Neville chimed in, though he didn't quite meet Harry's eyes.

"Definitely," Seamus agreed, and he *did* meet Harry's eyes, a little too firmly, really.

"Thanks, guys," Harry said.

"That's the stupidest thing I've ever heard," Ginny said. "*Wekissed*."

"Yes, I remember..."

"But things aren't always black and white, Ginny," Hermione said gently. "Right, Harry?"

"That's right. And I'm only telling you lot in case, you know... In case, later, there's a reason to."

"Like you wanting to bring a guy back to our dorm? You can't do that, Harry. It's not fair! If we can't have girls up, you can't have guys!"

Ron's objection was seconded around the room.

Harry was just glad that Ron wasn't having a total breakdown, the way Ginny said he had when Charlie came out. "I don't plan on having anyone over. I just wanted you guys to know, that's all."

The truth was, Harry *hadn't* wanted everyone to know. Not even close. But with Ginny always trying to sit on his lap and 'work on things', and Ron trying to show him magazines that simply did not appeal, Harry's cauldron had boiled over, so to speak. And he'd just... blurted it out.

Hermione had instantly corrected him, of course. He wasn't gay...he was bisexual. She knew this because she saw him looking at girls from time to time. Ginny had objected to that until Harry reminded her that she had *no* reason to object...he'd made that very clear, he thought.

Hermione was right, anyway. He did like girls. Some girls. Sometimes. Mostly not, though. He liked the ways girls looked and the way he imagined they would feel, but he couldn't picture himself *with* a girl, and not just sex. When he thought about dating, it was with guys. Not that he expected to ever find another bloke with those inclinations at Hogwarts. It was only... ten months until school ended for good. Then he'd... find other gay or bisexual men, somehow. There had to be networks or something for things like that.

Hermione would help.

Harry looked around the room. Dean was back to his sketchbook, Neville was pretending to study, Ginny was gone...when had that happened? Ron and Hermione were talking in hushed voices, and Seamus was... suddenly beside him.

"That must have been really hard," he commiserated. He patted Harry's thigh lightly.

"Er, yeah, but I've got a great group of friends, you know?"

"That we do," Seamus said, chuckling. "Still, if you ever need to talk, or... whatever. I'm here for you, mate."

"Seamus! Get away from him, you great pervert," Ron yelled, sending Seamus running to their dorm room.

"How come it's no big deal that Seamus likes guys?" Harry asked. He felt like pouting.

"Because Seamus likes *everyone*. Scratch that. *Everything*. And he's always been like that."

"Oi!" Seamus shouted from the top of the stairs. "Keep that up and I'll be having a go at you!" He raised his fists threateningly, but Ron just laughed.

"You wish!"

Seamus gave a wink and one more exaggerated nod to Harry before disappearing for good.

Harry dropped his head into his hands. He hoped his friends could practise a little discretion with the news. He didn't want to end up on the cover of *the Daily Prophet*.

Part Two of Six

Chapter 2 of 6

The war changed everyone. Harry comes back to eighth year knowing exactly what he wants, and unfortunately for him, so does Draco. Is it just Harry's imagination, or is his worst enemy harbouring a secret? Harry finds out about Draco's new side and *definitely* doesn't want to help. But it's not really up to him. (Veela fic)

Part II

The explosion took everyone by surprise. As explosions often do.

It was epic; of Longbottomian proportions. There was the soft sound of ashwinder eggs being dropped into gently roiling potion bases, a little *plop, plop* that made Harry smile a bit before he dropped his own in, adding to the symphony.

And then Ron tried to pass in front of Harry to ask Hermione about the newt eyes that they'd had left over. Harry hadn't had enough room to move, and he'd tripped on his book bag and stumbled back into the desk behind him, knocking their cauldron back and forth until it tipped onto the floor at Harry's feet. It landed on something...later, Slughorn declared it was an improperly cleaned spill from the class before...and then there was only white.

White... blond.

Smoke was curling over the floor like dry ice and Harry couldn't see anything farther than a few inches in front of his face...which made the fact that he could see Malfoy *very* clearly all the more confusing.

"What..." Harry broke off into a fit of coughs, the smoke snaking into his lungs.

Then suddenly he could breathe again. And see. It was dark. *Under Malfoy's cloak*.

"Better?" Malfoy asked, his normally pale grey eyes dark.

Harry shifted, realising that Malfoy was fully and completely atop him, caging him in. "Er, I think we're safe..."

"We have no idea what could happen if you inhale those fumes or get it in your eyes. Best be safe until we get the all-clear."

Harry had the horrifying mental image of everyone else in the classroom being completely fine, the smoke clearing, leaving him on his back and Malfoy straddling him with his cloak over both their heads.

He freed a hand and lifted the edge of the cloak. Immediately, thick white smoke filled the space, leaving them both hacking.

"Thanks for..." *Saving me?*

"Well, I was the only one who noticed you being your usual clumsy self."

"And why is that?" Harry countered. He wanted answers to why Malfoy had been watching him so intently.

Malfoy was so still that Harry worried for a moment that the smoke had frozen him somehow. But then he said, "I was just walking by; don't make a big deal out of it."

"Like you were just walking by when you pushed me against the table and pinned me in front of everyone?"

Malfoy shifted at those words and there was another explosion.

Inside Harry's head this time.

"You're hard!" he whispered harshly, struggling anew. Malfoy was definitely aroused and Harry just couldn't have that happen around him.

In one swift move, Malfoy applied more weight so Harry couldn't budge, grabbed Harry's wrists and held them in one hand (and *that* wasn't fair), and brought his face so close that Harry could see the way his lashes were dark at the bottom and lightened as they got longer.

Nothing happened.

Harry waited and waited, but Malfoy didn't move, just held Harry there, writhing like a butterfly with a steel shaft pinning it, desperate for freedom and *not understanding*.

Then, inexplicably, Malfoy rested his cheek against Harry's. Malfoy was cool and smelled like smoke and cedar, and Harry breathed in deeply because there was nothing else to do.

"Harry."

It was whispered against his ear, or maybe not even whispered but just *thought*...though that didn't explain why Malfoy's lips had touched his ear, had moved his hair, had exhaled sweetly. There was a world of unspoken in his breath.

As it was a day of explosions, there was another. It consisted of Malfoy leaping to his feet, righting his cloak, and tearing from the room, ripping a hole in the smoke that closed in after him as if glad to see him go. Harry wasn't sure if he shared that sentiment.

"Are you okay?" Hermione asked, helping him to his feet. "We couldn't find you!"

When he stood, Harry realised he must have been beneath the desk. Why had Malfoy gone to such lengths? Was he trying to fuck with Harry's head? That seemed like a lot of effort and not quite the easiest way of going about it.

So if his intentions weren't malicious, what were they?

"I'm okay, just got dizzy and sat down. Where's Ron?"

"Some of the potion got on him, and he started smoking like crazy. He said it didn't hurt, but Slughorn took him to the infirmary and told us all to get out. You weren't in the hall so I came back. Can we go?"

"Oh!" Harry started. It dawned on him that the room was silent, devoid of panic. "Yeah, let's get out of here."

They left the room, and Harry realised how stagnant and offensive the air in the classroom was in comparison. He inhaled...but where was the cedar smell?

"Hermione, I need to talk to you." he said it quickly, rushing the words out because if he didn't say it now, he never would.

"Well, I guess we're free for the rest of this period. Want to go back to the common room?"

Harry shook his head. Too many people there would want to talk about the explosion...or Harry's sexuality...and neither were topics he was keen on at the moment. "Library?"

Hermione brightened up and led the way.

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"So, what do you think?" Harry asked, biting his lip. He'd relayed all the strange things Malfoy had been doing over the past week.

"Well, to be totally honest, Harry, I'd say he has a crush on you. That or he still hates you and wants to complicate your life in any way possible. Both options seem equally viable at this point."

"That's what I thought." Harry groaned and cradled his head in his hands. "Why can't he just be normal and love or hate me from afar? Why does he have to do it to my face?"

"Who's doing what to your face?"

Harry cringed inwardly; he hated to admit it, but he felt awkward around Seamus these days, with him always making passes at Harry and trying to initiate discussions that made Harry realise how woefully unprepared he was for this whole gay thing...or maybe just sex in general.

"We were just talking about the explosion in Potions," Hermione said quickly. She gave Harry a commiserating look, but it didn't make him feel any better.

Seamus plopped down onto the seat beside Harry, and Harry took that as his cue to leave. "I have to go have a shower or something. I can smell the fumes on me still."

Harry turned and only just checked himself from running. He'd wondered what it might be like to experiment with someone like Seamus. Harry didn't know where he'd gotten so much experience from, but it made Harry uncomfortable. Wasn't there anyone who was just coming to understand themselves? Had everyone really figured this stuff out ages ago?

He felt alone.

"Oi, Harry!"

Merlin. "Yeah, Seamus?" He turned to face his approaching tormenter.

"Did you think about what I said this morning? About that book?"

"Yeah, I don't really need it, Seamus. I'm not with anyone and I'm not likely to be."

Seamus looked ready to interject, but Harry needed to be alone. There was a bathroom coming up, and he veered toward it. "Sorry, mate, gotta use the loo. Something about those fumes aren't agreeing with me, if you know what I mean."

Raising an eyebrow, Seamus just nodded and gestured him away.

Ducking into the bathroom, Harry leaned against the door and sighed. The book Seamus wanted Harry to read had intrigued him, but he couldn't bear the thought of actually asking for it. He'd just find a way to find one on his own, or better yet, Hermione would find some for him. He was sure she was researching on how to relate to and understand gay friends at that very moment. Seamus' book, however, was sure to have a more *hands-on* understanding of homosexuality.

"Well, isn't this familiar..."

Harry looked up to see Malfoy's face staring back at him in a mirror. Though it wasn't the same bathroom, the memory of that day plunged Harry into icy waters, his breathing catching as his mind flooded with images of Draco falling back, blood, so much of it, blame... all his.

With a shaky voice, Harry said, "What are you doing here, Malfoy?"

Malfoy chuckled and turned, leaning against the sink. Water had dripped onto his shirt from where he'd obviously splashed his face with it. "I suppose the fumes just aren't agreeing with me, either."

Rolling his eyes, Harry pushed off the door and approached Malfoy. There was a strange quickening in Malfoy, a tightening of his entire body as Harry got closer.

"So what's your problem? Why have you been acting so strange lately, following me and watching me?"

"But, Harry," Malfoy said in an imitation of a simper. "We've *always* watched each other. And it always seems to culminate in a bathroom. Care to scar me for life again, or just go straight to murder this time?"

Harry's ire flared, spitting and bitter. "At least I didn't cast an Unforgivable!"

"So that means you're forgiven?" Malfoy spat.

The silence stretched between them as the words hit Harry like a blow.

Draco took a step closer, and Harry refused to back down. "I don't remember you asking for forgiveness."

"That's because I didn't. And I won't. I was defending myself. And I didn't know what the spell even *did*... but you knew what yours meant."

"Does that make it *better*?" Malfoy's voice had risen in pitch, and it almost hurt Harry's ears to hear it. There was a strange flickering around Malfoy's body, like magic going awry. The mirror behind Malfoy filled with white, though nothing in the room was that brilliant, glowing shade. Still, Harry's feet remained firmly planted.

"No," Harry said, after a long moment. "I hurt you badly, and I meant to, but I didn't mean to *do* that. So... yeah, I am sorry."

The flickering magic stopped, and Malfoy's body seemed to shrink as his anger visibly left him. The white glare left the mirror and Harry questioned whether he'd imagined it.

"Harry, I..."

The use of Harry's name startled them both. Malfoy looked confused for a moment, as if someone else had spoken. He took another step forward, and even though the anger had passed and the apology spoken, Harry didn't step away. It seemed important that he... prove himself.

Shaking himself off, Malfoy started again. "Potter, there's something I suppose I have to tell you. I was hoping it wouldn't come to this, but things are getting a little awkward and I think once you *know*, it'll get better."

"What are you talking about?" Harry demanded, shaking his head. He almost wanted to feel afraid, to get that same twisted anger and disgust that he usually did when Malfoy was around, but there was none of that.

Harry stubbornly bore out the ensuing silence, meeting Malfoy's silver stare and finally rolling his eyes and turning to leave.

Malfoy's hand reached out and grabbed Harry's upper arm. The fingers were cool, even through Harry's robes, and the tight grip strangely powerful.

"I'm a veela."

Harry wanted to laugh. "*What?*"

"Potter, I'm a fucking veela. A magical being. Hello?" He lifted up a strand of his white-blond hair as if that explained everything.

"Are you... are you a girl?" Harry slowly shook his head. He had no idea what Malfoy was trying to pull, but he didn't want to play that game.

"Are you a complete moron? Wait, no need to answer that. No, I'm not *agirl*." Malfoy looked amusingly insulted, but Harry was too astonished to find it funny. "There *are* male veela, you know. We just aren't as obvious about our true nature."

"Your true nature..." Harry repeated dumbly.

"It's because... I mean, you don't hear about the male veela because there *aren't* many, that's true. But there's fewer of us because veela... well, it's in every veela's nature to attract men."

Malfoy was looking at him pointedly, but Harry just wasn't following. Why would Malfoy want to attract men if he wasn't *attracted* to men?

Oh.

"So you're a gay veela, then?" Somehow, the idea that Malfoy was a veela was less shocking than the fact that he was *gay*. Malfoy *poked* like a veela. Harry was actually surprised no one had ever speculated on that before.

Malfoy didn't answer, just glared.

"Why are you telling me this?" Harry went to the bathroom counter and hopped up, leaning back on his hands. He rather liked having information that no one else did, especially about Malfoy.

"I wish I didn't have to," Malfoy mumbled, pacing in front of Harry.

"So why do you?"

"There seems to be some sort of... connection between us. Or, at least, something that ties me to you. It's bloody annoying, really, but I don't know how to stop it."

Harry wasn't sure what he was talking about, but he could see that Malfoy was distressed. He hadn't experienced anything, certainly.

"What sort of connection?" Harry asked.

Whatever Malfoy said was buried under his breath. Harry rolled his eyes in exasperation. This was his *free* time...he'd certainly suffered enough for it. Why was he wasting it here? Slipping off the counter, Harry walked past Malfoy, intending on heading up to Gryffindor Tower for a kip.

"Where are you going?" Malfoy snapped, grabbing Harry's arm.

"You're wasting my time. Either tell me straight what's going on, or I'm leaving."

Malfoy sneered, but dropped it only a second later. He sighed. "I feel pain when you do. I hurt when you hurt."

Harry's eyes widened. *That* was rich. Still, Malfoy's face looked as sincere as Harry suspected it was capable. Keeping his eyes on Malfoy, Harry pinched the back of his hand. Malfoy hissed and lunged forward, grabbing Harry by the neck and slamming him against a wall.

The grip wasn't tight enough to choke, but it still hurt, and Harry kicked out, trying to get Malfoy off him.

"You must be fucking lying, or you'd be in pain right now!" Harry cried, slumping as he realised Malfoy was just too strong. The knowledge burned him, but at least he was the better wizard. Still, being held against his will in a school loo was humiliating.

"This is interesting," Malfoy said. His fingers got even tighter, and Harry could no longer breathe easily.

"Fuck you," Harry rasped while he could. His hand found his wand and he whipped it out, snapping it against Malfoy's neck at the same time as he was freed from Malfoy's grip.

"Did that hurt you?" Malfoy asked, unconcerned about Harry's wand in his face.

"Yeah, it fucking hurt," Harry snapped, his voice scratchy. He swallowed hard, thinking about what hex to use.

"It didn't hurt me." Malfoy's voice was full of wonder, and he seemed all too pleased. All of a sudden, though, his face fell. "I didn't mean to... well, I did. But I only did it to test a theory. And you're fine."

"Great, so you were wrong about the connection. I'll be leaving now. And stop following me around!" Harry brushed past Malfoy again, determined to get out of the bathroom, into his bed, and pretend that Malfoy's hand on his throat hadn't sent something horrible coursing through him.

"I wasn't wrong!" Malfoy called, forcing Harry to stop at the door.

He turned, weariness in every move. "What?"

"When you pinched yourself, I felt it. I just don't feel it when/ hurt you."

"Well, that's convenient," Harry muttered. He didn't know what to do. He wanted to leave, to forget all about these strange happenings, but Malfoy wasn't being his usual self, and he *had* shared something important: his magical being status. It couldn't hurt to hear him out. Unless he tried to choke him again, in which case, it very well could hurt.

"I know you probably don't believe me, and I don't blame you. I knew there was veela in my blood, but I never thought... We all thought it was dormant. And now something's happening and I can't... I can't very well write home and ask...I'm not allowed to speak with either of my parents for a year as a condition of my release. So I'm confused, too."

It was a huge concession. But it didn't make Harry feel any better. After all, Malfoy didn't have any answers, and all Harry had were questions.

"So what do you want from me?" Harry asked finally.

Malfoy took a few steps toward Harry, but didn't encroach on his personal space. "This connection... I sort of know what it is. I think I do, anyway. But I'm not sure, and I don't want to do anything drastic. It all comes down to the fact that you can't get hurt. I don't usually tell people this, but I don't have a very high threshold for pain."

"You don't say," Harry deadpanned, immediately recalling the Buckbeak incident.

"It's true. So whenever you get hurt...and that includes clumsy Gryffindors falling into you and potions explosions...I feel it. And I don't want to. So just... be fucking careful, all right?"

Nodding absently, Harry took in Malfoy's appearance for the first time. He was surprised to see him looking rather sickly. His pale skin had lost the sheen that made him look healthy, and even his posture spoke of mild defeat.

"What do you think the connection is?" he asked slowly. Crazy notions flooded his own mind, but he dismissed them. What could it mean? Did Harry have some veela blood and Malfoy was just recognising his own kind? That seemed unlikely, though it was rather a neat idea. He'd have liked to be able to seduce any man he wanted...

At that thought, the crazy notions were back, more force behind them than before. He tried to recall everything he'd learned about veelas, but there wasn't much. Even Fleur had been very private about her heritage beyond the obvious characteristics.

"I don't know," Malfoy said, too quickly.

It was obvious that he had *some* idea. Why he refused to say, Harry couldn't even begin to guess.

"Well, I'm sorry. It's not like I go around trying to get hurt, so I can't even say I'll be more careful. I hope it goes away, whatever it is."

As Harry turned to leave yet again, a thought occurred to him. "The mirrors were whited out before and it looked like you were... flickering or something."

Malfoy's eyes went huge, and, inexplicably, a smile split his face. Harry noticed that he looked much younger when he didn't have a lip drawn up in disgust.

"You saw them... What did they look like?"

"What did what..."

"My wings! I've never seen them. Sometimes I'd been sure they were there, but I couldn't feel them. What were they like?"

"White. Shimmery. Kind of glowy."

"Glowy?"

Harry shifted from foot to foot. "Yeah, like fairy lights or a concentrated *lumos*. They're really beautiful," he added before he could stop himself. "Pretty gay, though."

Malfoy snorted. "Only fitting, I suppose. You're one to talk, anyway."

Glaring, Harry opened the door and walked out. Cutting off his nose to spite his face, he gave a vicious twist to the skin on his arm, gratified when he heard Malfoy shriek behind the closed door.

Harry went, as planned, to his dorm room to have a lay-down before lunch, but he found himself unable to fall asleep. At any other time, it would have been a dream... but images of immaculate white feathers filled his mind.

*

"What do you know about veela?" Harry demanded of Hermione. They'd returned from dinner and were now sitting before the fireplace in the common room. Ron was playing wizard's chess with Seamus, who, to Harry's relief, had stopped casting such pornographic glances toward him.

"Everything there is to know, of course," she replied, not looking up from her Transfiguration text.

"Really?" Harry exclaimed, surprised.

Hermione gave him a look that said, *You should know better*, and Harry grinned.

"Of course not. I know a little. I'll admit, I was... intrigued by Fleur's appeal back during the Triwizard Tournament. I did some reading then."

Harry knew that by intrigued, Hermione meant jealous. At least a little. She'd wanted Ron, after all, though she denied her feelings for him had begun at that point...Harry knew better. The two had been in love since they'd been in nappies...they just hadn't realised.

That kind of destined love... It must be so nice to share.

"Have you ever heard of a veela feeling someone else's pain? Through some sort of connection?"

Finally putting her homework down, Hermione tilted her head and looked at Harry. "I'm not sure," she said slowly. "It sounds a little familiar, but I can't think of where I read it. I thought you were doing your DADA creature research essay on unicorns?"

"It's not for school," Harry said, realising too late that he'd blown what would have been a perfect cover. "I mean, it is. Sort of. Er... like the effects of veela and unicorns. Yeah, fascinating stuff. Not a lot of information to be found, though."

Hermione looked so sceptical that Harry almost burst out with a confession, but something about the way Malfoy had told him everything, as if he couldn't help it, made Harry hold back. It was important that this stay private... for now.

Still, from the way Hermione was staring at him, he was sure her conclusions were building already.

"I'll have a look, see if I can find anything," she said, making a note in her dayplanner. "Is there anything else you want to know?"

Harry really, really wanted to ask about gay veela, but he figured that wouldn't be as simple to cover-up...not that his previous cover-up was impressive in any way.

Still, he *did* have a vested interest in all things homosexual, or so he could convince her...

Deciding to risk it, Harry said, "I was also thinking of researching veela who like other veela or... you know, non-veela... of the same sex. Gay veela," he clarified, though he suspected Hermione's confused look had less to do with her not understanding what he meant and more to do with how awkwardly he was posing the question.

Jotting something down beside her first note, Hermione nodded. "I'll do my best."

*

"Malfoy looks like the inside of an arse, doesn't he?" Ron said gleefully, staring beyond Harry at the Slytherin table.

Harry couldn't help it; he turned and looked. Malfoy *did* look like shite, he realised.

"What do you reckon's wrong with him?" Harry said quietly, mostly addressing Hermione, who also stole a gander.

She shrugged, a line between her brows denoting worry. Hermione had been quick to forgive those who'd wronged her during the time before the war, and it appeared that this attitude extended toward Malfoy, who Harry wasn't entirely convinced deserved the forgiveness. Though he did agree with her opinion that actions out of duress shouldn't be held against a person.

Sure, that might be true...so Harry could forgive Malfoy a lot, but there was too much that *hadn't* been a result of the war, too many incidents over the years. Between Harry and Draco Malfoy, there could be no forgiveness.

Only, that didn't exactly feel true anymore, and *that* was irritating. Especially with Malfoy looking so sick. He was paler than ever, bordering on translucent, the blue veins beneath the surface like a roadmap to what made him human. He looked as though he'd lost weight, too, his robes hanging off the rack of his body like they'd been purchased two years in advance. Even from across the hall, Harry could see Malfoy's hand tremble a little as he took a bite of his pudding. After a few aborted attempts to get the shaking under control, Malfoy threw his fork down in disgust and stood quickly.

Too quickly, apparently, for he swayed in place, his eyes closing as his hands fell flat against the tabletop, bracing his weight.

Harry watched as Pansy Parkinson placed a steadying hand on Malfoy's waist. There was concern in her face, but Malfoy shook her off and walked away. Though his step was a little slower than usual, Malfoy made it to the doors and beyond without any further incidences.

Both Hermione and Harry were frowning, but when Harry mentioned it, Hermione said it looked like Malfoy might be anaemic and otherwise didn't seem too concerned.

Harry wasn't concerned either, not really. He just wanted to know if Malfoy's sudden illness had something to do with their so-called connection. Was Harry sick, and that was why Malfoy was experiencing it? But then Harry should also be sick... unless Harry was sick with something that only affected veelas... Ugh, but Malfoy said he only *felt* Harry's pain, not that he actually *experienced* it. So if Harry was cut, Malfoy would be hurt, but he wouldn't bleed. Any illness, then, would only cause Malfoy discomfort, if it even worked that way.

There were far too many questions and not enough ways of finding out the answers. Even if Malfoy didn't care about the outcome of this strange situation, Harry did.

And Malfoy wouldn't have even bothered telling him if he *didn't* care. After all, it was just more ammunition for Harry to use against him, if he wanted. That was how Slytherins thought...always about how they could turn the situation around and make it about them.

So then... if telling Harry had put Malfoy in a more vulnerable position... *why* had he told him?

*

Nearly a week after the explosion in the Potions classroom, the uneasy timidity of the students began to wear off. People became more confident, less likely to notice small errors. Harry wished that hyperactive state of attention had lasted a *little* longer... He was still a little cauldron-shy.

Harry watched Malfoy from over the top of his bubbling potion. He was stirring clockwise every minute as Ron sliced and diced, so he could afford to drift away a little.

Malfoy was a veela. It was strange how many people in the wizarding world weren't entirely *human*. Such a concept didn't even exist in the Muggle world. There, if you weren't a human, there was no way you'd be able to go about your daily life. With Malfoy, it was a secret, but it didn't seem to be a life-or-death one. Other veela were not afraid of their magical being becoming public knowledge. Was it because male veela were gay? Was it the stigma attached? Was Malfoy not ready to come out?

As Malfoy went through the motions of brewing, his movements tentative and measured, Harry considered their bond. He had the insane urge to test it, right at that moment, and if Malfoy hadn't looked so fucking sick and depressed, Harry would have slapped his own face just to see the look on Malfoy's.

Hermione looked back and caught Harry's eyes. He knew he looked mildly guilty, and he tried to cover it up with a grin, but she just gave a little frown and turned back to her work. He saw her write something on a loose leaf of paper and fold it.

When it was time to begin putting the ingredients away, Hermione stopped Harry and slipped the note into his robes without even looking at him. Harry smiled in approval of her subterfuge, though Malfoy had seen it, as he was always watching Harry.

Giving Malfoy a nod, Harry put the supplies away and returned to his desk, taking out Hermione's note.

He should be mated by now.

As the words chased each other through his brain, Harry gasped, looking up at Malfoy, whose hands were braced on the table as if he needed the support just to stand.

Was it somehow Harry's fault? Was the connection between them stopping Malfoy from finding his mate? What if the veela in Malfoy was all fucked up and thought Harry was his mate?

Harry crumpled the note and shoved it back into his robes pocket. He had to talk to Malfoy, to figure all this out.

That was when Malfoy fainted.

Everything happened rather quickly and somehow slowly enough that Harry's heart seemed to have to beat harder to get blood to his brain.

Hermione tried to catch Malfoy, but he was taller and heavier and all she did was break his fall, which was, in itself, a very good thing, for he fell fast and hard. Her guidance stopped him from hitting his head on the table or floor.

Slughorn called for everyone to stop what they were doing and back away, to give Malfoy space. He asked a Hufflepuff to go get Madam Pomfrey, and the student rushed off with the importance of someone with a Job To Do.

Harry remained frozen. He had the suspicion that this was all his fault, though he couldn't quite figure out how. It just seemed too strange a coincidence: Malfoy telling him about his veela-ness and then fainting in class a week later? Was the fainting related to him being a veela? Would Harry have to tell someone in order to save Malfoy?

Would Malfoy hate him for that?

Did Harry care?

The answer to both was, strangely, yes. Harry approached Hermione...not Malfoy, who was pale and trembling, eyelids flickering, face made of smudged shadow...and knelt. He took Malfoy's hand without thinking. It was icy cold, but the fingers closed a little around Harry's, the pulse in Malfoy's slender wrist erratic but there.

"What's wrong with him?" Harry asked no one in particular.

When Harry spoke, Malfoy's eyes opened, gunmetal grey peeking between pale lashes, focusing on him. The hand in his tightened to the point of being uncomfortable, but Malfoy's gaze didn't waver.

Malfoy seemed to mouth something, but Harry couldn't make it out.

"Harry? Did you hear me?"

Harry looked up, met Hermione's eyes, and immediately went back to staring at Malfoy. "Sorry, no."

"He seemed really out of it all class," she said, speaking to Slughorn now. "I asked him what was wrong but he didn't even look at me."

"Back away, back away!" came Madam Pomfrey's strident tones as she bustled into the room and quickly cast a spell to levitate Malfoy. Harry's hand fell away. She checked his vitals with her wand before giving a brisk nod to Slughorn and guiding Malfoy's body to precede her out the door.

Harry moved, quite beyond his own accord, to follow, but Hermione stopped him. Slughorn directed them all back to their seats, but Harry took Malfoy's instead, determined to learn what she meant by her note.

"Do you think Malfoy being sick has something to do with him not having a mate?" Harry whispered urgently while Slughorn tried to coerce calmness back into the class.

Hermione looked pensive, but shook her head. "It's more than that. I think it's because Malfoy has found his mate."

Without knowing why, Harry shook his head at once. "No, I don't think so."

"Why not?"

Unable to articulate the feeling, Harry could only shrug. He just *knew* that Malfoy wasn't attached to someone...

...else.

"No," Harry growled, eyes wide. He stood suddenly and ran from the room, ignoring the surprised cry of Slughorn and Ron's concerned call.

His feet knew the way to the infirmary by rote, and Harry's mind raced as his body closed the distance. He would have thought he'd have caught up to Madam Pomfrey, but by the time he made it to the hospital wing, she was already settling Malfoy on a bed.

"Mr. Potter, you shouldn't be here!" she scolded, though it wasn't heartfelt. A line formed between her brows as she drew her wand again and again over Malfoy's still, supine form.

"I was there when it happened," Harry said by way of explanation. "Maybe I can help."

After a moment, she nodded. "Did anything happen before he fainted? Any sort of trigger you noticed?"

Thinking back, Harry could recall nothing and said so. Pomfrey looked disappointed but didn't stop casting spells. Malfoy looked strangely still, and Harry wanted to reassure himself that there was life in that body still.

"He'll be okay, won't he?"

"I have every reason to believe so. Mr. Malfoy's circumstances are... peculiar. But this isn't unheard of for someone in his position."

The cryptic words made Harry realise that Pomfrey, whether she'd just discovered it or had known all along, knew what Malfoy was.

"I know that he's a veela," Harry blurted. Malfoy's body twitched at Harry's voice, and Harry tried to be quieter. He had no idea how fragile Malfoy's state was, but he didn't want to exacerbate it.

Pomfrey looked at Harry sharply. "And how did you come across this information?"

"He told me."

Raising an eyebrow, Pomfrey waited for further explication, but Harry didn't offer it. He didn't want anyone to know about the connection between him and Malfoy, not even her.

"He is suffering because he hasn't claimed a mate," she said a few moments later. She tucked Malfoy in more securely, her movements brisk but still somehow maternal. It seemed like she was speaking more to herself than Harry.

"Is that... unusual? I mean, he's really young, right? Shouldn't he wait until he's finished school to... er, claim someone? That way he'll have more options." Realising he was babbling, Harry stopped himself. He wasn't sure why seeing Malfoy in that state affected him so much...all he knew was that he didn't like it.

"Veela don't live their lives according to our rules, Mr. Potter. His body knows when he is ready, and for some reason, he is fighting it. That can be very dangerous."

Harry stepped closer to the bed. He had the strangest urge to touch Malfoy, to hold his hand again or even get into the bed beside him, just ~~to~~e there, be near. Why hadn't Malfoy claimed his mate if he knew who it was?

For a moment, Harry felt something akin to jealousy...but he decided it was simply because there was someone out there just for Malfoy, and Harry rather thought he deserved that more. To have someone who loved him no matter what? To belong to a partnership like that? That would be really special.

"So why don't we bring whoever it is in here so he can claim them and get better?" It all seemed pretty simple to Harry.

For the first time since Harry'd arrived, Pomfrey really looked at him. "Mr. Potter, I appreciate your concern and will pass it along to my patient once he awakens, but there is no need for you to be here if you can't think of any reason that this might have happened when it did."

"Right," Harry said, nodding and backing away from the bed. "Well, good luck and... you don't have to tell him I was here or anything."

Pomfrey didn't respond, so Harry turned on his heel and left. His pace was strident until the portrait to his common room came into view; it was then Harry realised he didn't really want to be in there at all. He wanted to be alone or to be alone with and talk to Malfoy. To tell him he was being ridiculous. That most people would be thrilled to learn that they would be connected to one other person for the rest of their lives. A built-in best friend, like Ron and Hermione.

Malfoy, Harry knew, would laugh at him for such romantic notions. Malfoy probably wanted ~~to~~mate with whomever he wanted and not be tied down to just one. Or maybe his mate was a Muggleborn and that was why he hadn't claimed him...he didn't think he was good enough. Well, Harry had a few thoughts on that!

He decided he'd talk to Malfoy the next day. Give him some time to recover before Harry took him down a notch and taught him a thing or two about being grateful.

Part Three of Six

Chapter 3 of 6

The war changed everyone. Harry comes back to eighth year knowing exactly what he wants, and unfortunately for him, so does Draco. Is it just Harry's imagination, or is his worst enemy harbouring a secret? Harry finds out about Draco's new side and *definitely* doesn't want to help. But it's not really up to him. (Veela fic)

Part III

"Malfoy!" Harry hissed, prodding none-too-gently at the body on the hospital bed.

Malfoy didn't stir.

Harry had found the idea of putting Malfoy in his place highly appealing. It had occupied his thoughts until he'd finally fallen asleep the night before. But then, come early morning...way, way too early morning...the thoughts had driven away sleep and so explained his presence in the infirmary, poking at Malfoy with determination.

Deciding to wait, Harry sat at the foot of Malfoy's bed, uncaring that the movement shook the patient. He crossed his arms over his chest. What was it like to be a veela, he wondered. Could Malfoy fly? He had wings, sort of. Harry had seen *something* in the bathroom mirror, though they hadn't actually been *on* Malfoy. Harry wondered who would win in a race: flying veela Malfoy or him on his broom?

He thought he would win.

"Potter?" came a croaking voice.

"Yeah. Now wake up, we have to talk."

Malfoy heaved a sigh and said, "I feel like shit. Could you get me some food or something?"

"No, I'm not getting you *food*," Harry snapped. "I'm here because I have something to say."

"So you know, then." Malfoy rolled onto his side and sat up, scooting back against the metal headboard and propping his pillow against it.

"Yeah, and I think it's really stupid, if you ask me."

"I didn't," Malfoy said dryly.

"Well, I don't care! You tell me all about your veela-ness and then expect me to, what? Pretend you said nothing? You need to look at this as an opportunity."

"To what?" Malfoy's eyes narrowed and focused on Harry. He still looked quite ill, and his breathing was a little ragged, but he was alert, and that was something.

"To *be* with someone...to have someone! Don't you think your mate deserves to know, too? This isn't just about you."

"Potter, what *are* you talking about?"

"You have a mate and you're too stubborn or stupid or both to make your claim."

"Oh, and let me guess, strong and brave Harry Potter would just dive right in, claiming his mate without a second thought?"

Harry glared. So what if he would?

"And what if this mate was no good for you? What if he hated you...or you hated him? What then?"

Rolling his eyes, Harry moved closer on the bed so they could lower their voices, though he doubted they were raised merely because of the distance. "You can't hate your

mate, you utter moron. They are your *mate*, your match, your other half. You love them and they love you. That's what having a *mate* means."

Malfoy's eyes were round. He pulled his knees up to his chest and wrapped his arms around them, creating a very obvious barrier between them. "Where did you hear that, *Witch Weekly*? You've never even met a veela before, and you obviously don't know anything about us."

"I have so met a veela," Harry retorted. "Fleur Delacour, one of the Twiwizard Champions. She married Ron's brother."

Malfoy was nodding as if Harry had explained much more than he really had. "So you think that because Delacour and Weasley are madly in love that that's how it happens? Your naiveté is showing."

"They do love each other!"

"Oh, for... yes, yes, I'm sure they do. But that's not always the way of it, all right? Not all veela are lucky enough to fall in love with their mates. Mates are simply the physical and spiritual match for the veela. There's no rule that says anything about love."

"Oh," Harry said, deflated. What the hell was the point of that, then? "So you do know who your mate is, I take it?"

"Of course I do." Malfoy looked tired, and Harry felt a little guilty for waking him when he obviously needed the sleep.

"And you don't think you could ever love him?" To be tied to someone for life without love... instead of being angry with Malfoy, all Harry could feel was pity.

"That's not... exactly the problem," Malfoy admitted. He wouldn't meet Harry's eyes.

"What is, then?" Harry couldn't help but be drawn into Malfoy's drama. It was tragic and unfair, and Harry wasn't feeling jealous anymore.

"It's him."

"I see. Well..." Unsure what to say to a suddenly candid Malfoy, Harry shifted. "Good luck, then."

He'd barely slid off the bed before Malfoy said the words that would change his life forever.

"It's you, Potter."

Harry couldn't help it; he laughed. "Don't be stupid. Did Pomfrey put you on drugs or something?"

A weariness that went far beyond his years settled on Malfoy's pale, normally haughty features. "Just go."

"No! Why would you say something like that? What are you trying to prove? Are you even a veela, or was all this just to fuck with my head?" Even as he said it, the words rang untrue.

"Just get out of here!" Malfoy shouted, and then groaned and clutched his head. "Please, go."

"I'm not leaving until you explain." The longer Malfoy left the words hanging in the air, the more Harry was forced to entertain their veracity. Could he really be the hated mate Malfoy had referred to? There was that connection between them...

"There's nothing to explain. There were dreams. You were in them. I didn't believe it until I saw you. Now there's no denying it. It's true. All you have to do is deny me, all right? Just say no thanks, and I can find another mate."

Harry froze. "It's that easy? Why didn't you tell me before?"

Again, Malfoy wouldn't look at Harry. "I don't know," he whispered, but there was more to the words than Harry could begin to understand. "But now you know, so go ahead."

"Nothing personal, right? You get that, don't you?" For some reason, the thought of just flat-out telling Malfoy he didn't want him was... uncomfortable. ~~He didn't~~ want Malfoy, of course. It just all seemed so callous, and it was happening so fast...

"Yes, yes. Get on with it!"

"Okay. So, er, Malfoy, well, I'm sure you're, you know, a swell guy once a person gets to know you... or whatever. But seeing as we hate each other and that..."

"It's not like a break-up," Malfoy snapped, his grey eyes furious. "Though if that's how you normally do it, I actually feel sorry for the Weaslette. ~~Just~~ stay it."

"Calm down! So, this will break the connection between us, too, right? Because that's kind of creepy. I mean, what if I died?"

"I would die," Malfoy said simply. "And yes, it will break the connection."

"I reject you, then. Er, veela Malfoy, I reject you. Is that formal enough?"

Malfoy stared at Harry for a long time, forcing Harry to shrink back a little. Normally he would have glared back, but Malfoy didn't really seem angry. He shouldn't be; now he could go find whatever wizard struck his fancy and mate with them, instead.

"That's fine. We're all set, Potter. Kindly leave."

"Oh. Okay. And you're sure it worked?" A strange, bereft feeling settled over Harry, but he pushed it away. Honestly, why would he consider, even for a second, that being mated to a veela...to *Malfoy*...could be a good thing?

"It definitely worked." Malfoy's voice was certain, but he winced, and it seemed so out of character for someone who normally kept all cards to his chest that Harry hesitated.

"I'll leave now," Harry said.

"Do."

Harry rose, not taking his eyes off Malfoy. Still huddled at the head of the bed, Malfoy looked strangely small. He would have hated to know that Harry had thought such a thing.

"Bye, then." Malfoy didn't respond and Harry walked away, turning before the door to see Malfoy lay back down on his side, facing away from Harry.

Please, Harry thought, but if asked, he wouldn't have been able to admit what he was begging for. Watching Malfoy, Harry dug his nails into his arm and dragged them brutally across his skin.

Malfoy howled.

"What the hell!" Harry shouted, running back to the bed. Malfoy didn't turn over to face him, just curled up more tightly.

Harry walked around the bed, but Malfoy's eyes were closed tight.

"Why did you lie?" Harry asked, remembering to keep his voice down. The last thing he wanted was for Madam Pomfrey to come and kick him out. Not before all this was settled.

"I didn't know. It's your fault, anyway."

"How is this my fault? I did as you said; I rejected you."

Too quickly for someone as weak as Malfoy was supposed to be, he sat up, fixing a dark glare on Harry, who took a step back in reaction.

"You have to *mean it*."

"I did mean it!" Harry cried reactively. "Of course I meant it."

"Well, you obviously didn't convince the veela in me. Fuck, it's like you just..." Malfoy broke off, his eyes wild for a second before he flopped back down on the bed, groaning.

"What?"

"It...the veela part...thinks you're *teasing* it. Like some sort of... mating ritual."

It was so strange that it would have been funny had it happened to anyone else but Harry. Being in the centre of it, being involved, made it scarier than anything else.

"Well, tell your stupid veela part to back off and take no for an answer."

"If you don't plan on actively rejecting me and *meaning* it, there's nothing I can do."

The words were ominous, and Harry was chilled, as if a breeze had curled off the walls and surrounded him. "What does that mean?"

Malfoy looked small again, and cold. And... scared. "It means that until you actually manage to realise what a stupid and horrible idea this is, you're stuck with me, and I'm stuck with you. There are certain steps... If we don't take them, I won't get better."

"I *do* know what a bad idea this is! It's your fault for not knowing that no means no. And what steps? If we don't take the steps, won't that just mean that you'll know you're being rejected?"

When Malfoy spoke, it was quiet and clear, resigned. "There's a huge difference between being pushed away by a potential mate and being pushed away by *my* actual mate. Which you are. If you don't reject me, you're my mate, and if the steps aren't taken, I get worse."

Harry's knees felt too insubstantial to keep him up, so he crouched on the floor and buried his hands in his hair. Why didn't the veela think that Harry meant the rejection? He *did*! He didn't want to be bound to Malfoy, to be stuck with one person forever...

Oh. Except that he *did*. That last part, anyway. Harry wanted a forever love. And for some reason, fate or whatever had deigned to give him that chance. Maybe not the way he might have liked, no. He could think of about a million people better suited than he and Malfoy were. Still, there was a *reason* for all of this, wasn't there? If there was anything Harry'd learned since becoming a wizard, it was that everything seemed to happen for a reason.

Maybe a part of him didn't want to reject Malfoy because he'd be giving up on his chance...possibly his only chance...for a lifelong connection. Could he even battle that part of himself? Could he somehow convince his heart that Malfoy was all wrong for him?

"I can't do it," Harry muttered, unable to look up and see if Malfoy was peering over the side of the bed, basking in his patheticness.

A flash of white startled Harry into falling on his arse as his line of sight became saturated with Malfoy, who was suddenly on the floor in front of Harry, a strange smile on his face. He still looked sickly, so the effect was chilling, but there were was a strange glow around him, centred on his huge, white wings.

Like a predator, Malfoy crawled toward him on hands and knees, white-blond hair falling into his eyes, his wings tall and erect on his back.

"Holy shit," Harry said, awed. Malfoy looked...*powerful*. Unearthly, preternatural, almost demonic but somehow beautiful.

And then Malfoy stopped in front of Harry, who'd leaned back on his hands to take in more of the vision before him. Malfoy pushed Harry's legs apart with his knees, towering over him.

"Harry Potter," Malfoy murmured, the sound clear and low. The immense whiteness that surrounded Malfoy seemed to glimmer and pulse. "My mate. Inconvenient, maybe, but not the worst case scenario, certainly."

Harry tried to glower but couldn't hold it. Malfoy's wings stretched out and then closed around them both, the tips tickling Harry's arms before they circled around his back, enveloping them in an embrace together.

"What are you doing, Malfoy?" Harry demanded. "Anyone could walk in and they'd find out about what you are! About what I am now!"

Softer than a whisper, the wings trembled and retracted, vanishing seamlessly into Malfoy's back, which glowed white for a moment before returning to his normal, too-pale skin tone. The shimmering whiteness left with the wings, and now Malfoy was nothing more than a normal boy...

A normal boy who was sniffing Harry's neck.

"Er, okay, so, now that that's all figured out, I can go, right?" Harry wanted to get up...needed to get up...but he didn't. Malfoy's body was hot, the warmth radiating out to kiss Harry's skin, even through his clothing. Malfoy's lips, which were on Harry's neck, were cold, making the tongue that poked out to taste him startling in contrast. "Malfoy, get off of me!"

"Silly Potter," Malfoy said, tsking. "You couldn't reject me; that means you accept me. You're mine. And there are steps, remember? To make sure I'll get better, that I won't stay or get sick again."

"What steps?" he demanded. He tried to shuffle back, but Malfoy's hands gripped his thighs and held him steady. There was a pinch through Harry's trousers, almost like claws, though Malfoy's fingernails seemed perfectly groomed. Still, Harry decided to remain immobile for the time being.

"Well, I have to claim you, obviously."

Harry sighed. "All right, but make it fast, yeah?"

Malfoy purred, and before Harry could fully take in that fact, Malfoy's lips were pressed against his, harsh and demanding, unyielding. Harry buckled under the onslaught, falling onto his back on the cold infirmary floor.

Malfoy was atop him instantly, covering him with his larger body. "I'm glad to hear you're so amenable," he whispered before kissing Harry again.

"Whoa, whoa, Malfoy," Harry said, coming back to himself and pushing Malfoy at the shoulders.

Malfoy relented only slightly, propping himself up and looking down at Harry with a perked eyebrow. "You should probably call me Draco," he said in a musing voice, giving Harry an animalistic smile.

"You should probably get off of me," Harry countered.

"But, *Harry*," Malfoy...fuck, Draco...whispered against Harry's cheek. "You said you wanted to be claimed."

"That has nothing to do with all this kissing, though! Say you claim me and get it over with. Honestly."

Draco laughed, his eyes sparkling with mirth as he shook his head. Harry was really beginning to resent the position he was in ~~he~~ was the mate. He should be in control! Or, at least, control should maybe be shared.

"My little mate..." Draco's fingers were warm against Harry's cheek, soft. But they turned harsh as they moved down to his neck, gripping his throat and applying enough pressure that Harry gasped. "It's not like a rejection. It's a little more than words. Actually, a *lot* more."

"How much more?" Harry whispered, taking a deep breath as Draco's hand loosened.

"Enough that we're going to want to get a little more comfortable. I don't think a claiming should take place on the stone floor, do you? Especially since it'll be your first time."

"First time? First time for what?" Harry asked in a rush, hating the grin on Draco's face and the rush of blood that said maybe the floor wasn't so bad after all.

"Dear Harry, I'm going to make you come. Then you get a neat little tattoo. And then you're mine."

"What?" Harry was horrified to hear his voice almost a squeak. That was just too much to take in. Coming? Tattoos ~~his~~?

"I reject you," Harry tried again, desperate. "I totally, wholeheartedly reject you and your pervysteps and your permanent body modification. Rejected."

Draco chuckled and took Harry's hand, poking Harry in the ribs with it. They both grunted at the slight pain. "I wonder if, when I take you for the first time, I'll feel it in my own arse? I guess not, since I can't feel the pain I cause you. Probably for the best."

"How about I fuck you?" Harry offered, willing to bargain since his stupid brain obviously wouldn't let go of the idea that he had a mate for life.

"I don't think so, little mate. There are certain dynamics to be upheld in a veela relationship."

Harry's brain pounded. "I don't think Fleur fucks Bill," he said; it was a straw, so he grasped.

"Maybe not in the way I'm going to fuck you soon enough, but I guarantee she is very much in control."

The words invoked way too many mental images about people he considered family. Also... if he couldn't manage to reject Draco, Fleur and Bill would totally know that he was the... the bottom. Blood rushed into his cheeks at the thought of their knowing stares and Draco's contented smirk should they ever be in the same room together.

"This tattoo, then," he said, changing tacks. "It'll go away once I manage to reject you, right?"

Draco rose abruptly. After watching Harry struggle to do the same for a moment, he sighed and held out a hand. An uncomfortable déjà vu assaulted Harry. He took Draco's hand, still holding it after he'd regained his footing.

"Here's the thing, Potter. After I claim you, you can't reject me. Only a potential mate can reject a veela. If I claim you, you're definitely mine, no backing out. If you try to reject me at that point, I'll get sick again, faster and worse than before."

Harry dropped Draco's hand, aware that his own was slightly damp. "How long would it take you to get over that, then?"

"I won't."

"Oh. *Oh*. Then we really, really shouldn't, you know, do the claim thing."

"There *is* something of a time crunch, Potter. If you hadn't come to see me, I might not have woken up at all. I sensed your presence enough to wake up. If you leave me in this limbo, I'll get very sick, very fast, and I might not wake up again."

"Are you saying you could actually *die* if you don't, you know, makemecome?"

Draco perched on the edge of the bed. He didn't seem as imposing now that he wasn't pinning Harry beneath him. But Harry remembered how quickly Draco had moved when Harry had been on the floor; he wasn't taking chances, so he remained standing.

"I don't know if I'll die. I'll just fall asleep. And I won't wake up."

"Fuck. Why didn't Hermione tell me that? Why didn't we learn this stuff in school?"

Draco shrugged. His eyes were shadowed. "There's not many like me alive right now. All I know is what I've inferred from reading and what my intuition tells me. As for learning it in school, well, we did. Some of it. But veela are very private, reluctant to even share the secrets amongst themselves. Trust me."

Defeated, Harry took a seat despite his reservations. If Draco wanted to attack him again, it would happen. Those were just the *dynamics*, apparently. Expecting the worst, Harry was surprised when Draco's hand came over and rested right beside Harry's, the length of their smallest fingers touching. Draco seemed to relax at the touch, bowing his head forward slightly.

"Tell me about the steps," Harry said. His mind was made up, whether he liked it or not. He was reserving judgement at the moment. This side of Draco was a little easier to digest than his normal snide and cruel self.

"They aren't really steps so much as guidelines. There are things we'll need to do in order to build the bond. Once that's complete, things should calm down a little."

"What will calm down?"

Draco hesitated long enough for Harry's hackles to rise.

"You're not really experiencing it, as the mate," Draco explained.

"Experiencing *what*? Look, I know this is probably really hard for you; you probably thought you'd be mated to some high-society, pure-blood type, but if we're in this together, I want to be informed." Harry thought it was fair to at least get full-disclosure. This was his *life* they were so blithely discussing.

With a nod, Draco said, "There are a lot of..." Draco coughed and looked away from Harry. "Feelings. Physical and mental. It's hard to control, sometimes."

"What sort of feelings?" Harry asked, though he wasn't entirely certain he wanted to know.

"Er, possessiveness, hunger, dizziness, jealousy, aches and pains... desires."

At the strange litany of symptoms, Harry's eyes grew wide. "Hunger? Like, certain foods?" That was something he could actually manage.

"Not that kind of hunger," Draco said in a low voice, now looking at his knees.

"Oh. Um, then what about the other stuff? Is there anything I can do to help with any of that?"

With a growl, Draco said, "You could stop prancing about like you're in heat, letting people look at you and touch you all the time!"

Harry almost retorted with some ugly words, but then he just snorted. "That would be the possessiveness, I'm assuming?"

Draco hung his head, shaking it morosely. "All the fucking time."

"Well, I'll try to keep the prancing to a minimum," Harry quipped.

Without warning, Draco turned and grabbed Harry by the shoulders, slamming him onto the bed, facedown, and sitting on his arse.

"You think this is a fucking joke, Potter? You think you can just play along until something better comes along? It's *not* like that." Draco was caging Harry with his body, pinning him to the bed and hissing in his ear.

There was only a brief struggle until Draco grabbed Harry's wrists and put enough weight on them to make Harry go limp in defence.

"You let me mark you, and that's it. You and me, forever. But if you think this is just a game, if you plan on just leaving me to get sick after I claim you, I'll fucking kill you now and save us both the trouble."

After a moment of silence, Harry said, "How do you feel after I get hurt, Malfoy?"

Draco seemed to catch the implication...that since Harry's pain hurt Draco, killing Harry wasn't the smartest idea. He relaxed his hold but didn't move off of Harry.

"It's not a joke, not a game, okay? I just... I don't know how to handle this, all right? It's a lot, all of a sudden. So if I make light of it, it's only because I'm scared shitless."

"That's quite an admission from the great Harry Potter." Draco stretched out above him, still holding Harry's arms, so that his chest was flush against Harry's back... and pretty much everything else was flush, too, which made Harry more than a little uncomfortable.

"I never minded being scared as long as I could do something about it."

"So what do you plan to do, little mate?" Draco's lips were almost touching Harry's ear, and Harry couldn't figure out why he didn't move away.

"Get it right."

"That's your master plan?"

Harry shrugged, regretting it when the movement caused friction between them. His physical reaction was completely understandable, he told himself. It was half-fear and half from having a male body press down on him for the first time in his life. Still, he would do anything for Draco to not notice.

"You have a lot of symptoms. That's a lot of things to try to solve. So we'll work on the issues like any couple would. We just have to trust each other and stop fighting."

"Something we haven't managed to do once in seven years."

"If anything, I'm learning there's *definitely* a first time for anything."

It was a good talk; it would have been better if they'd been face-to-face, but progress had been made.

"I have to claim you," Draco said, sounding breathless.

Every point of contact between Harry and Draco...and there were a lot at the moment...suddenly felt ten times hotter. "Do you mean you have to, as part of the steps? Or do you mean... you really, really want to?" The way Draco had said it made it seem more like the latter. The idea that Draco *wanted* Harry was something Harry was still coming to terms with. It was possible he never would.

"Definitely both." Draco lifted up only long enough to haul Harry's shirt up around his shoulders before settling back down, his legs on either side of Harry's. When he leaned onto Harry again, the rough slide of cloth against his over-stimulated nerve endings revealed that Draco hadn't removed any of his own clothing.

"How does the claiming work?" Harry wriggled beneath Draco, not liking the lack of power he had. It was much more acute than it had been during their talk.

In answer, Draco wormed his hand beneath Harry, cupping his crotch. They both let out groans, and Harry's struggle became more intense.

"What are you doing? There's nothing claim-like about this!" But any attempt to escape only ground his groin harder against Draco's now squeezing hand.

"Oh, this is *all* about claiming, little mate." The words were a breath against Harry's ear, warm and promising.

Draco's hand began to move, stroking Harry through his trousers, tracing the outline of his now fully erect cock, lightly pinching the crown.

Though one of Harry's hands was now free, he saw no need to use it for anything other than clenching the scratchy bed sheet. Draco's hand, even through his clothing, was hot and seemed to know exactly how Harry liked it. He even wondered if there was a similar connection between them, relating to pleasure instead of pain. Could Draco feel that Harry felt good? He wanted to ask, he really did. He meant to.

But Draco's movements became rougher, and then Draco settled more firmly against Harry's arse, and the plain heaviness of Draco's arousal sent renewed surges to his own cock.

"Help me out, little mate. Move a little."

Feeling almost compelled, Harry did as he was told. He began rocking into Draco's hand, first only with his hips, but soon enough with his entire body. His shoes dug into the bed for leverage as he rutted. There was something primal, basic and natural about what was happening; the sounds, the smells, the sight of Draco's hand gripping Harry's wrist reactively to every noise Harry made...

All that and the fact that Harry got to wank so very seldom in a crowded dorm...not to mention the fact that the last time he'd done *anything* with another person, it had been Ginny and all kinds of disastrous...brought Harry to the edge more quickly than he might have liked.

"That's it, Harry, let go. Come for me, let me claim you. You're mine, just let it all go."

Harry cried out weakly, his lungs compressed by the weight atop him, and came... and came... and came.

His orgasm...the longest ever, damn Draco...was rudely interrupted by teeth clamping into the skin over his shoulder blade. Harry could *feel* the individual perforation of teeth, even as he shouted and tried to get away any way he could. But Draco held him down, even though Harry could swear he was bleeding.

Finally, Draco let up...on the bite, anyway. The rest of him, including his erection, was still pinning Harry down.

"Thanks for the warning, fucker," Harry mumbled, still floating on endorphins. The pain acted as a strange counterpoint to the pleasure of his climax, and the dual throbbing in his back and his balls made him a little dizzy.

"Were you confused by, 'I have to claim you'?" Draco asked, and his chest pressed against Harry's back again, stinging a little when it touched the bite mark.

Harry didn't know what to do; Draco was *nuzzling* him. Was that veela behaviour? Draco behaviour? After-sex behaviour? All three?

"That's it, then?" Harry asked, speaking into the sheets.

To his surprise, Draco pressed a kiss to Harry's wound before rising up and sitting back on the bed. "That's it. You're mine."

Flushing as he remembered all the similar things Draco had said just before he'd come, Harry managed to finagle himself into a sitting position. He found he couldn't look at Draco. There was an uncomfortable slickness in his pants, making him wince.

"I should get back to my dorm. Class is starting soon, and I have to have a shower."

Everything seemed to hit Harry at once. He was *mated*. Draco was like... his husband. Or wife. At the very least, his boyfriend. Draco was his boyfriend; they were together. *Forever*. How was he going to explain this? Would they be public about their relationship? Would they do stuff like kiss and go on dates? Live together? Go to the Burrow for Christmas together?

It was hard to breathe. Very hard. Definitely harder than normal, because normally it wasn't very hard to breathe at all, in fact, it was rather an instinct. Not something that could be designated as simple or difficult because it just *was*, until it *wasn't*, but that would mean he was dead, so if breathing didn't get easier and soon, he'd definitely die.

"I could clean you up," Draco said suggestively, beginning to close the space between them in that leonine way of his.

With a start, Harry leapt off the hospital bed, arranging his clothing properly and then fussing until they were back to messy again.

"No, I really have to go," he said quickly, backing away. "Er, great claiming, and thanks for the... you know. I'll see you around!"

Draco slid off the bed and approached Harry, a determined look on his face. Harry thought that running might worsen the whole breathing snafu, so he let Draco take hold of his jaw, tilting his head slightly up so their eyes met.

"Be good, little mate. And don't let anyone see my mark just yet. I'll see you at lunch."

That was sort of a date, wasn't it? Harry inhaled sharply, but it seemed to bring no oxygen to his lungs: just full, empty air.

"See you at lunch," he repeated, his eyes on the door. Draco let him go, and Harry decided that running was the best option, even if it did kill him.

*

Harry'd managed to avoid Hermione and Ron the entire morning, even though he shared Transfiguration with both of them. But once the class let out, they were on him like...very faithful and loyal...terriers.

"Where were you this morning, mate? I woke up and you were gone, earlier than I even knew you were capable of." Through Ron's teasing voice, Harry heard concern, which made his stomach twist up.

"I went to check on Malfoy." The name tasted all wrong in his mouth now. There was absolutely no way he'd be able to keep this secret. There were secrets...like aching scars and dreams and wanted criminal godfathers and Horcruxes...and there were *secrets*, like pretty much marrying your worst enemy who happened to be a veela.

"How was he?" Hermione asked. She looked anxious; Harry recalled that she'd seen Draco faint, and that despite her feelings toward him, Harry knew she would have been horrified.

"Much better. Much, much better."

"What was wrong with him, anyway?" Ron asked.

Harry was walking a little more quickly than usual. He wanted to get to Herbology early; he'd hoped to get a moment to himself to sort out his tumultuous thoughts, but it seemed as though that wouldn't happen. Harry was grateful for his friends, but his mind was too messy to share just yet. He knew he'd have to tell them. Soon enough, everyone would know, and he wanted them to know first.

"Just, you know, the fumes, and he hadn't eaten in a while..."

Ron nodded easily but Hermione gave Harry a close look. He fought the urge to spill everything under her merciless gaze, but he simply smiled at her, forcing her to smile back.

Once in the designated greenhouse...early, but not by much...Harry listened without devotion as Hermione and Ron bickered good-naturedly over Ron's pop quiz result. Professor Sprout had been good about giving the eighth years time to adapt to being in school again...or being in school under a non-maniacal regime...but Ron's big, fat T caused Hermione to froth at the mouth.

Ron took it in stride, as he did everything these days, grinning at Harry when Hermione wasn't looking, rolling his eyes when she caught him.

Such simple problems, Harry thought with a hint of wistfulness. Their affection was so free and easy, not bogged down with sarcasm or hidden beneath a violent history.

Would he and Draco ever be able to get to that place? Was Harry hoping for something that simply couldn't exist? He wanted to be with someone...his heart obviously

wasn't very picky...but had he destroyed any chance at happiness by allowing it to be Draco?

Had he really had any choice to begin with? Did it even *matter*? What was done was done. Harry just had to prove himself adaptable yet again.

Resigned to make the most of the situation...or at least not completely crumple under indecision and regret...Harry felt better already.

Until, that was, Draco walked into the greenhouse. With savage insouciance, Draco leaned against the glass wall and glared at anyone who cared to look. Even Harry found himself on the receiving end of a rather nasty stare. Remembering his decision, Harry smiled at Draco. It was hard to look at him without blushing. Draco had done things to him that no other person had. With Ginny, there'd been tender moments and less intense exchanges of pleasure, but with Draco, everything had hurt and set him on fire.

All the events from earlier that morning were written clearly in Draco's eyes. Harry felt naked, exposed. Could everyone tell what had happened? Did they know that he gave himself over to Draco Malfoy?

The way Draco looked at him, Harry wondered how anyone could *not* know. Especially Hermione, who was glancing between them with a furrowed brow. *Oh, great*, Harry thought, mentally snarling at Draco. *Now you got her thinking!*

Professor Sprout entered a few moments later, and the class began. The lessons seemed a little tame compared to the last time Harry'd been in her class, consisting mostly of written assignments and reading. Harry used the time not to read or prod at his rather sad-looking plant, but to consider how to break the information to Hermione and Ron.

Ron had taken the news of Harry's sexuality surprisingly well. Maybe this would fall under the same category? The permanence of it was what would cause the most problems, Harry knew. If it had been just a fling, Ron might be more amenable to Harry sowing his wild oats. But there was more to it than that, and Harry knew he couldn't blow it off as such.

He wasn't used to dealing with things like this on his own; the strain was getting to him already and it had only happened that morning!

"Harry," Ron whispered. "You all right? You look a little out of it."

Ron put his hand on Harry's back in a sympathetic gesture. His palm came down over the bite Draco had made on his shoulder blade, but instead of pain, an intense wave of pleasure crashed over Harry, starting at the claim mark and flowing all the way down to his toes. Harry bit a moan back, but only just. The idea that Ron had made him feeling in *any* way sexual made Harry extremely uncomfortable.

Laughing, Harry leaned forward to escape the touch. Ron's fingertips brushed over it as he took his hand back, and Harry couldn't contain a small whimper.

A low, rumbling noise intruded on Harry's embarrassment, and he looked up, shocked to see every eye in the greenhouse not on him, but on Draco.

Who was growling.

With his lips drawn back and his eyes narrowed, Draco made a noise like no human should make. Even Sprout looked taken aback. Draco noticed none of this; he only had eyes for Harry.

"Malfoy," said Hermione, brave as ever. "Are you all right?"

Instead of answering, Draco pushed away from the wall and walked around the centre tables, approaching Harry. Ron stepped between them, glaring at Draco.

The growling increased in volume until Harry stepped forward. Aware that all eyes were on him...and all ears straining to hear what he was about to say...Harry stepped around Ron, ignoring his cry of disbelief.

"Draco, go for a walk, okay? Just go for a walk until you feel better and I'll talk to you later."

Rather than calming Draco, the words seemed to light something within him. There was a pulsing aura of white all around him, and when Harry looked around, he suddenly realised he was the only one seeing Draco's features change. Which was a good thing, because imposed over his face, like a projector movie gone wrong, was the flickering visage of a bird, a sharp beak opening threateningly. Glancing down, Harry could see that Draco's fingernails had curved into talons, and he gulped. Whatever Draco was upset at, Harry wasn't sure he could manage on his own.

Taking a step closer, Harry lowered his voice and tried again. "Draco. Calm down."

And like a switch had been flipped, Draco did. The strange dual likeness faded until he looked himself again. Angry...furious, even...but himself at least.

"Potter," he ground out. "We need to talk."

"Mr. Malfoy, is there a problem?" Sprout called.

Harry looked over at her and the rest of the class. They were all staring at Draco, but their faces weren't mirrors of horror or discovery. They simply looked entertained.

"I need to talk to Potter," Draco said, still staring at Harry.

"It can wait until after class," she said sternly. "Now, back to your station."

"Draco..." Harry said. "Not here, please."

After a long moment, Draco nodded. But he didn't return to his place...he left the room in angry strides, slamming the glass door hard enough that there was a collective gasp followed by a sigh of relief when it didn't shatter.

"Madame Sprout, Malfoy must not be feeling well. He was in the Hospital Wing all last night," Hermione said in a concerned tone that didn't stop her from shooting a look to Harry that said *you will be explaining this*.

Sprout looked placated and nodded. "I had heard that. Still, very rude." With a sigh, she went back to her instructions, and Harry went back to idly poking the plant.

It yielded no answers.

Part Four of Six

Chapter 4 of 6

The war changed everyone. Harry comes back to eighth year knowing exactly what he wants, and unfortunately for him, so does Draco. Is it just Harry's imagination, or is his worst enemy harbouring a secret? Harry finds out about Draco's new side and *definitely* doesn't want to help. But it's not really up to him. (Veela fic)

Part IV

After having avoided lunch...some Gryffindor he was...Harry was well on his way to starving by the time dinner rolled around. Still, he dallied enough that Hermione and Ron left without him, giving him a few minutes to himself. He used the time to get a good and proper panic started, but it had worn off after he'd reasserted his promise to himself to just get through this as painlessly as possible.

As he entered the Great Hall, his eyes were automatically drawn to Draco at the Slytherin table. He sat alone...sort of. He sat amidst his fellow Slytherins, but Harry had never seen someone look so lonely in the middle of his supposed friends. Pity tugged at Harry's heart; that was, until Draco's calculating eyes met his. There was no challenge, no promise, not even anger. Just... discontent. All over and inside.

Biting his lip, Harry sat across from Ron and Hermione, who were holding hands under the table and trying not to show it. He had that. In a way. He wondered if Draco was the hand-holding type. He didn't want to go the rest of his life without ever holding someone's hand.

Draco would just have to get used to that, he decided.

"Hey," he said, not even bothering to try to sound cheerful.

"Harry," Hermione said, leaning forward. So it was starting already. "What's with Malfoy? He seemed to have his sights set on you during Herbology."

"He was just *staring* at you," Ron grumbled, looking thoroughly confused and put out.

Harry sighed. It was as good a time as ever. Maybe the reaction wouldn't be so disastrous in a public place.

"I have to tell you both something, but I don't want you to get upset. Just hear me out because there's nothing you or I can do about it anyway."

Hermione and Ron both looked a little startled, but they both nodded and Ron gestured for him to go on.

"When I went to see Malfoy..."

"Oi, Harry!" cried Seamus, wriggling his compact body between Harry and the sixth year next to him. "Look what I had my mum owl me."

He slammed a book onto the table, and the noise drew everyone's attention. When Harry realised what the book was about...*The Joys*, according to the title, *of Gay Sex*...Harry turned it over quickly and glared at Seamus.

"You couldn't give this to me in the dorm room?"

"Now, what would the fun be in that?" Seamus laughed and rose, patting Harry heartily on the back.

Like with Ron, Harry was overtaken by a jolt of pleasure way too strong to be attributed to the likes of Seamus. Harry hissed, trying to ride out the sensation. It was unlike anything he'd ever felt. Sexual pleasure had always been associated with his cock, but this was different. This seemed to reach into his very core, and it made him weak enough that he was grateful to be sitting down.

"Enjoy!" Seamus said, laughing loudly and walking away. Harry watched him leave in dismay. Everyone was staring at his book, obviously desperate to know what was on Harry's reading list.

As Seamus exited the doors, Harry's eyes were drawn to Draco again. He watched as Draco rose with purpose, walking toward the doors Seamus had just exited through, a look of feral determination on his pale features.

"What were you going to say, Harry?" Hermione asked.

"Er, just one second," he said, standing. "Here, take this." Harry thrust the book at Ron, who took one look at the cover and blanched, foisting it off on Hermione. She calmly put it in her book bag and shook her head at Ron.

Harry rushed down the aisle to catch Draco before Seamus got seriously hurt.

"Draco," he said as he approached. He looked back at the Hall; only a few people were watching, and they looked away as Harry continued to look at them pointedly.

Draco stopped, much to Harry's relief, and turned. "What is it, Potter? Need to borrow a belt, seeing as yours is worn through with notches?"

Closing the space between them, Harry said, "What are you talking about?"

"First Weasley, then that git, now me? Who's next for you...Slughorn?"

Harry rolled his eyes. "Ron's my friend and Seamus was just giving me a book."

"What book?" Draco asked, as if doubting Harry could even read at all.

"It's about... you know... coming out. As gay." There was probably a chapter on that, anyway. Maybe before all the good stuff.

"You're coming out?" Draco was distracted, and Harry planned on exploiting that. Whatever possessive drama Draco had been about to instigate, Harry didn't want to indulge.

"I already came out to my house. I'm actually surprised it hasn't circulated enough to reach you."

"So then... Weasley and Finnigan. They know you're gay."

Harry rolled his eyes. "Yeah, they know. Listen, what the hell's going on with that bite mark? It's..."

Draco raised an eyebrow and waited. For some reason, Harry blushed under the direct gaze.

"I can feel it. When... things come into contact with it."

"Things."

"A couple people accidentally touched it, all right? Are you going to be all possessive like this forever? I don't know if I can stand it."

For a moment, Draco looked pained. "Be careful what you say. That sounded pretty close to a rejection."

Eyes wide, Harry stepped even closer. There was barely a foot of space between them, but Harry didn't really notice. "It definitely wasn't. I just really don't like you acting like that. Ron and Seamus are my friends."

"Your friends who touch you and gift you with books on homosexuality." Draco did not look impressed, and Harry was sure the expression was mirrored on his own face.

"You never had a friend pat you on the back? Never did anything that deserved congratulations?" Despite Harry's promise to himself, he was falling much too easily back into the childish back-and-forth that had sustained them for years.

How could they ever learn to be civil?

"Almost, once," Draco said, an ugly sneer transporting Harry to only a year before.

"Fuck you, Malfoy," Harry growled, narrowing his eyes at the painful allusion to Dumbledore.

Harry turned to walk away, yanking his arm out of the grip Draco put it in.

"Harry, wait a second."

There was just no point. They couldn't move past the past. It was too hard; there was too much bad blood between them.

"Harry!" Draco's shout silenced the hall.

"Just leave it!" Harry said, overwhelmed. But true to Draco's nature lately, he couldn't.

He walked up behind Harry and put a hand on his back. Harry gasped; the contact was infinitely more intense than when Ron or Seamus had inadvertently touched him. Tension bled from him as Draco's fingers smoothed over the area.

What had they been fighting about?

"Little mate, listen to me. Are you listening?" Draco turned Harry to face him. He was so... bright.

Harry nodded. Draco's voice was very low. He was going to tell Harry a secret, he just knew it. They were close enough now that Harry could taste Draco's breath if he'd wanted to.

"I don't mind you palling around with Weasley. But I don't like Finnigan, and I want you to steer clear of him."

"He's my friend," Harry protested weakly.

Draco's fingers pressed more insistently against the mark, and renewed pleasure coursed through Harry's throbbing veins. He nodded again.

"This mark is my claim. While it's healing, anyone who touches it will activate the magic, meaning that you'll feel pleasure from it. As much as that annoys me, it's meant to heighten my possessiveness so I'll complete the claiming as soon as possible."

"Complete the claiming? Didn't we do that?"

"You're mine; that's true." Draco smiled, and through the fog, Harry was shocked to note that it was genuine. "But the claiming needs to be consummated. And then we need to make a public declaration."

"That all sounds really complicated," Harry said. He squinted; were his glasses dirty? Draco seemed to be ensconced in some sort of white mist. He wondered if Draco knew.

"It's very simple, little mate." Draco's fingers were constantly manipulating the bite mark, sending spark after spark of abstract desire through Harry. "We should meet later tonight to discuss the details."

"Consummated... You mean sex, don't you?"

"I do."

"Will there be lots of that, do you think?"

"I should hope so."

"Will there be other stuff, too?"

"Like?" Draco purred, stepping even closer. The white mist increased, and Harry could barely keep his eyes open against it. Within his line of sight, there was only Draco.

"Like dates and letters and house-shopping and... holding hands."

"Would you like those things, Harry? Be honest."

"Yes," Harry said, his mental filter completely and irreparably defunct.

"Then you will have them. I will make you happy."

"Thanks, Draco. That's nice of you." Harry's head lolled back a little and he distantly heard a voice that sounded strangely like Hermione's. "When they touched me, it wasn't like this."

"Of course not, little mate. Only I can make you feel this way."

That made sense. Harry nodded. Then his stomach growled and he frowned. He hadn't eaten in a very long time. Hadn't he been about to?

"You skipped lunch," Draco said, voice heavy with disapproval. His fingers stopped moving on Harry's back, but continued to rest there.

The white mist began to melt away. "I'm starving."

"Let's get you some food then." Draco's hand fell away completely. He turned and began to walk toward the Gryffindor table.

The enormity of what had just happened slapped Harry right across his flushed cheeks.

"Malfoy!" he snapped, stopping him with a hand on his back.

Draco had a smile on his face when he turned. "Yes?"

"What did you do to me? You used your... veela charm shite on me!"

"Actually, I didn't, though I could have. The veela allure didn't work on you before we were mated; that's how I was sure it was you. But if I wanted, right now..."

Disturbed by the wistful look in Draco's eye, Harry cut him off. "Okay, that's very informative, but *why* did you do that?"

"I just wanted you to listen to me without prejudice for a few minutes. I explained a few things to my satisfaction and now I feel confident that we understand each other."

"Do *not* do that to me again if you want me to accept you."

Like before, Draco looked physically ill at the threat. "Don't say things you don't mean."

Harry sighed. "I do mean it, Draco. This thing between us, it's already stacked in your favour. I need to know that things will be as equal as possible. If you can just make me bliss out and do whatever you want, that's not the sort of relationship I want to be in."

"You were blissed out?"

"Goddamn it!"

"All right, all right. I'm sorry. I won't do that again. Unless you want me to. But Harry... I meant what I said, all right? I do want to make you happy. And not just... not only because it's in the veela's nature to please his mate."

Before Harry could sink his teeth into the words, Draco grabbed his hand.

Hand-holding! his heart screamed gleefully.

Hand-holding! his brain warned, panicking.

Draco led them over to Harry's seat. The two stood there for a few long moments while Harry tried to wrap his head around what was happening. It didn't seem like that was going to happen any time soon, so he took a seat, facing an aghast Ron and a very interested but not altogether surprised-looking Hermione. Draco sat as well, looking bored.

"Harry... Don't be alarmed. You've been cursed. Or maybe poisoned. Don't move; I'm going to go get Professor Sturn. He'll know what to do."

"Ron, sit down." Harry glared until Ron did as he asked. Then Harry gave a long-suffering sigh and said, "This was what I'd been about to tell you."

Draco turned to him, seeming surprised. "You were going to tell them about us?" He looked quite pleased.

"Yeah. I'm no good at keeping secrets and... well, I needed help. *Andsupport*," he added, glancing at Ron who was staring at Harry, the whites around his irises showing.

"Harry, start from the beginning."

"Actually, Granger, Harry needs to eat. He can tell you all about the new development after."

Draco, oblivious to everything in the room, including the half-incredulous, half-disgusted glares from the Slytherin table, began dishing out a plate of food for Harry. He placed the now-full plate of food...all things Harry liked, too...in front of Harry, patiently waiting until he picked up a fork and knife and dug in with an apologetic look to his friends.

While Harry ate, Draco had an almost insufferably pleased look on his face. He crossed his arms over his chest and peered around the room, as if issuing a challenge.

Ron and Hermione were quiet while Harry ate, though neither made another effort at their own meals. Draco grabbed a roll for himself and buttered it generously. He shared Harry's water glass as Ron sputtered.

To Harry's embarrassment, Draco gave him a pleased nod when his plate was empty. Honestly. He cleared his throat, wishing his friends didn't look so expectant; that Ron didn't look so eager for Harry to say it was anything but what it looked like.

"Basically," Harry said, opting to just get it out and let them deal with it, "Draco is a veela and veelas need mates. Draco found his in me. I could have turned him down but I had to mean it, and I didn't. So now we're mated. We're together. Kind of like boyfriends."

"Not *kind of like* boyfriends," Draco corrected with a fierce look at Ron. "We are boyfriends."

Hermione exhaled sharply, shaking her head from side to side as she obviously tried to absorb Harry's abbreviated version of events.

Ron was a little more vocal. "You... how... Malfoy. Veela? When did... how could... You could have turned him down? Boy... friends?"

"Well, aren't you articulate," Draco said, rolling his eyes.

"Draco," Hermione said sternly, surprising everyone with her use of his first name. "Be nice to us or it will make Harry miserable."

Immediately, Draco lost his pompous look. His hand sought Harry's for more of that hand-holding business, and he actually looked contrite when he said, "You're absolutely right, Granger."

"And maybe you should try calling us by our first names, hmm? We're all going to be friends now, aren't we, Ron?"

"I don't think so, Hermione, to be honest," Ron huffed, placing his hands flat on the table. "Harry. I'm sorry if Hermione and I made you feel like a third wheel or something..."

Harry tried to interject, but Ron wasn't finished.

"That was never our intention. But this is *Malfoy*. Draco fucking Malfoy. Poisoned me, almost killed Katie? Countless uses of Unforgivables including an attempt at one against *you*? Let the Death Eaters into the school...got my brother *mauled*? Malfoy was on the side of the ones who killed Fred, Harry! Who got Sirius killed, who killed Remus and Tonks. He almost bloody killed Dumbledore!"

"He lowered his wand," Harry said meekly, his heart pounding.

It wasn't that he'd *forgotten* all of Draco's transgressions. They'd been swirling in the back of his mind all along. But having them tallied up like that made it seem so much worse. Hell, he didn't even know if Draco had taken the Dark Mark! How could he have been so irresponsible as to permanently bind himself to someone like that, knowing nothing about him except the bad?

"Harry," Draco whispered. He squeezed Harry's hand until he looked over.

"He's right, you know." Not that it changed anything.

"Harry..." At first, Draco addressed only him, but after a moment he looked to Hermione and Ron, including them in his speech. "I did do those things. I was stupid, cowardly, foolish, and *wrong*. Maybe you don't think I've paid for my choices. Maybe you don't think I can ever make up for the harm done, and maybe I can't. But I am *sorry*. You won't hear me say it again, and if that's not enough, I'll leave right now; Harry, you can make up your own mind about what you want to do next. But what I did was wrong. I regret it. I would do it differently. But I didn't take the Mark and I will *never* let anyone make my decisions for me again. And neither should Harry," Draco continued, looking pointedly at Ron. "Don't try to make up Harry's mind for him. He's smart enough to do it himself. Give your friend some credit."

Ron glowered on, and Hermione looked thoughtful. To Harry, Draco said, "You don't have to choose right away. Things have moved quickly, I know. But if you still want this, even a little, even if you're not entirely sure, meet me in front of the Room of Requirement at ten o'clock tonight. Just to talk. That's it, I swear."

Draco rose. Harry stared at the table.

"Weasley. Granger." In a lower voice, "Harry." And with that parting, Draco left the Great Hall.

After his exit, talk spiraled up all around them, almost deafening. But the trio remained silent: angry, uncertain, and confused.

*

"You're actually going?" Ron demanded as Harry got up from the couch in the common room.

"Of course I'm going, Ron. It's not like we can just break up. He could *die*."

"Harry's right," Hermione said gently, putting her hand on Ron's arm. "Harry needs to hear Draco out. And I'm not saying we should forgive him for everything he's done, but his contrition seemed genuine. We should at least think about it."

"Thanks, Hermione," Harry said, sighing. They'd been talking most of the evening, but it always circled back to Ron's initial arguments. It wasn't like Harry could deny what he said was true. That was the hardest part. Ron was right and there wasn't anything Harry could do about it.

"You're my best friend, Harry, and this doesn't change anything. But I don't trust him and I never will."

"Trust *Harry*, then," Hermione said.

Ron closed his eyes. "I do. Just be careful."

"I will be. Don't wait up for me, all right? This might take a while to hash out."

Hermione rose. "Just... remember that he only did what he was raised to believe was right. I don't agree with it, obviously, but I can understand how he got there."

"Well, Harry was raised with prejudiced Muggles and he didn't grow up hating wizards," Ron said sourly.

"But Harry *is* a wizard. Imagine if Harry had been a Muggle. He'd've grown up hearing the bigotry and may have come to think it was true...especially if he'd loved and trusted the Dursleys as Draco does his parents."

Shaking his head, Harry said, "I've got to go. Don't argue about this, all right? I don't want you two to fight."

They both smiled at him, making him feel better about leaving them.

"Don't worry," Hermione said. "We've fought about bigger stuff and survived."

That much was true. Harry gave a last look to Ron, who was pouting a little but at least didn't look as furious as he had before, and walked out through the portrait.

That his own feelings confused him wasn't shocking to Harry. He was rather used to having mixed emotions about things. But never about Draco. Draco had always been a constant in Harry's life, something to count on and never in a good way.

It wasn't that Ron had told him anything he didn't already know. He'd just been so caught up in the idea that he had a built-in partner for the rest of his life... never having to go on horrible, awkward dates, never having to cruise the bars, never falling for someone who didn't want him. Never having to break up...

Had he made the decision to avoid the type of pain that *everyone* experienced? Did that make him a coward?

So much of Harry's life had been uncertain. By this time the year before, he hadn't even thought he'd live long enough to experience anything that normal people took for granted. Now that everything was normal, why had he jumped at the chance to be different yet again? Hadn't he wanted to escape all that?

Harry realised that he'd been walking quite slowly, so he picked up the pace and took the stairs at a run, but once he faced the door that stood opposite the portrait of Barnabas the Barmy, he took a few moments to himself. To catch his breath... *not* to talk himself into going in.

He had to know what Draco thought about all this. Did Draco still hate him? Did being Draco's mate preclude that emotion? Had Draco forgotten all the things they'd done to each other over the years?

There were so many questions. Would he ever be able to ask them all?

Harry started when the door swung open. "Are you coming in?" Draco asked, trying to sound snide but mostly coming off nervous.

The thought that Draco was as uncertain as he was made Harry feel better. "I got this far, didn't I?" he asked rhetorically, ignoring the fact that he'd very nearly run right back to Gryffindor Tower where things were safe and certain.

"I suppose you did." Draco held the door open, and Harry passed through.

"Er..." Harry almost turned right around once he took in the contents of the room. Or content. A bed. A huge, wooden four-poster with black sheets. It looked very stable.

"When I passed in front of the door, I thought about what a good place to talk would be. I suppose I should have specified it wasn't that sort of talk. My mind was drifting a little, I'm afraid."

Nodding, Harry went to sit on the bed. He bounced a little on the supple mattress. Knowing nothing about thread count or anything like that, Harry couldn't comment on the quality of the bedclothes, but they felt very soft and cool. "We'll make do," he said, smiling at the way Draco's nervousness advertised itself.

After watching Draco pace for a few minutes, Harry decided to put him at ease. "Draco, I want you to know that, even though I think Ron was right, I still want this. You're not in danger of getting sick."

Almost faster than Harry's eyes could absorb, Draco sat beside him on the bed, close enough that the side of their thighs touched. When Harry looked at him, he saw that Draco was staring at his clasped hands. With some uncertainty, Harry placed one hand palm-up on his thigh. Draco took the unspoken invitation, his cool, slender fingers wrapping around Harry's thicker ones and folding over.

"I always knew," Draco said casually. They were both looking at their entwined fingers.

"Knew what?"

"About being a veela. It's a trait brought out by homosexuality, amusingly enough."

Harry frowned. "So if you'd been straight, you wouldn't have been a veela?"

"Exactly. My father wasn't one. Nor my grandfather. But there were a few further back in my lineage, though they obviously had wives and children despite their orientation. It doesn't dilute in the bloodline like other inherited traits. You're always just veela, though some people claim to be an eighth or a sixteenth, that's really just to make the whole thing less confusing for other people."

"So if all male veela are gay... how do you... you know? Make more baby veela?"

Draco rolled his eyes but gave Harry a fond look nonetheless. "There are a few veela colonies, made up of veela and their mates, and a male veela will, you know, suffer through a few evenings to perpetuate the race with the mated veela women."

"You mean the mates let their veela have sex with another veela?" Harry was so not okay with that. And it didn't seem necessary, really, since the line didn't dilute.

"It's more important to them to keep the race going. Keep it pure."

"You might as well know you won't be pollinating any veela ladies," Harry said, narrowing his eyes at Draco.

Draco chuckled. "I wouldn't want to. I'm happy with what I have. Quite surprisingly, really."

"It's not so bad," Harry conceded. Now that Ron and Hermione knew, even if they didn't exactly approve, Harry felt better about his decision.

The fact was, Draco had been much more agreeable than Harry had expected. Though things were a little awkward, it had been a rather seamless transition from enemies to mates. Every now and then Harry would look at Draco and an insult or hex would want to spring past his lips out of habit, but he'd quell the urge and the need to hurt him would transform into a less vibrant, more confusing need to just *be* with him.

"Anyway, as I said, I've had an idea my entire life, even before I really *knew*, about what would happen." Draco pursed his lips and seemed to think for a long moment. "It's different than I expected."

Harry nodded, their clenched hands at the foremost of his mind.

"I thought that if you said no, if you rejected me properly, I'd be relieved. Happy. I'd be able to find someone more suited. But I'm starting to think that it was you for a reason. And I always hated the idea of putting my life in someone else's hands, especially yours, but instead of being afraid of dying, I'm..."

Draco gave a nervous laugh, and it seemed loud in the relative silence. Harry was patient; he didn't know what else to do.

"You're what?" Harry prompted when it looked like Draco wouldn't finish the enigmatic thought.

"I'm just afraid of losing you. The rest, the sickness, is just... a given. That without you... there's nothing. I don't like that. It gives you too much control."

Deciding to reward the honesty with more of the same, Harry said, "We're both vulnerable here, Draco. I don't think either of us is in a position of power over the other, all things considered."

Taking his hand back, Draco shrugged. "At least my feelings are all mixed up with my instincts. I can blame the veela part of me for getting all..."

Harry knew Draco was thinking *mushy*, but Harry was thinking *human*.

Must be nice to have an excuse Harry thought, a little put out at the thought that Draco was writing his emotions off as part of being a veela. Harry could only blame his desperately lonely childhood and love-barren existence since then.

That it was Draco didn't matter. That it was *someone*, someone who was Harry's, forever; *that* was all he cared about, he told himself. Harry tried not to grab Draco's hand back.

"So you wanted to talk about the things Ron said, I'm guessing?" Harry asked, forcing levity into his voice.

Draco's eyes were solemn. "I said I wouldn't apologise again, but I didn't mean to you. If you want to hear it again, or for something else, I'll do it, Harry. I don't really have a choice. I *have* to make you happy. It's like this burning need below the surface, and when I'm not trying to please you, I feel... less of a mate."

"I appreciate the sentiment, Draco, but I don't need all that. I know you're sorry. I just *know*. I knew even before all this happened, really. And I trust McGonagall. I don't think she would have let you back unless you proved to her you were properly sorry. I made a mistake with not trusting Snape even though the Headmaster did. I won't do that to someone again." Harry's stomach suddenly clenched. "But if you're somehow fucking with me, trying to get laid or humiliate me, I swear to Merlin I *will* kill you."

"Take it easy, Potter," Draco said, sneering. But the expression fell and he looked serious again. "You saw. You saw the wings; you *felt* the magic of the claim mark. This isn't a joke. And if it were, it'd serve better to humiliate *me* than *you*, wouldn't it?"

"What do you mean? Is your position somehow more embarrassing than mine?" Harry yawned and stretched out his feet. He crawled into the centre of the bed and lay down against the pillows. He'd been up before dawn to see Draco in the infirmary, and he was exhausted.

"I'm the one who has to bend over backwards for you," Draco reminded him. He, too, got into the middle of the bed and stretched out beside Harry so that they faced each other.

The position was alarmingly intimate, and Harry had to shuffle back a bit. Draco had been right about one thing: he had the benefit of his veela-ness to help forget about their past. For Harry, being that close to Draco was a little unnerving, like he had to remind himself that things had changed.

"So you have to do whatever I say, then?" Harry asked, grinning.

"Not quite, little mate," Draco said with a smile of his own. When he spoke again, it rather belied his first protestation. "Why? Is there something you want?"

Harry laughed. The idea of Draco waiting on him, *servicing* him, was pretty funny. Until Harry's brain ran away with the idea of *servicing*, and suddenly he wasn't laughing anymore. "No, no, I'm fine."

An awkward silence followed, during which Draco seemed to be trying to read Harry's mind. Then he smirked, and Harry's stomach dropped. *Could Draco read his mind? Could veela do that? Shit...*

"You want to kiss me," Draco whispered. The sound barely carried across the pillows, but Harry's entire body tightened when it reached him. Then Draco lost his smile, taking on a more predatory look. "No, you want me to kiss you. Don't you, little mate?"

Fearing that answering with words would cement his culpability, Harry nodded. He did want that. He hadn't even really known until Draco had said it, but there it was, bared between them.

Draco closed the space between them until they were sharing breath. The kisses they'd shared that morning seemed a lifetime away as Draco put his hand on Harry's waist; he pressed lightly for a moment, hesitant, and then gripped solidly. Draco used that grip to coax Harry onto his back.

Propping himself up on his elbow, Draco leaned over Harry, caging him in. "Tell me," he said, his lips close enough that Harry could tilt his head and make them his, if that was what he wanted.

"Kiss me."

Draco gave a triumphant smile for a split second before lowering his lips to Harry's. Unhurried, easy exploration followed, and Harry didn't do much beyond letting the kiss happen to him. It was strange, being the passive one. With Ginny, he'd always had to initiate the kisses, had to guide them. Now, he let Draco take over, falling against the pillows and just... experiencing.

"Good?" Draco asked, pulling back. He licked his lips, and Harry's eyes tracked the movement.

It was strange, somehow, to think that Draco Malfoy's lips had been on his. To think that they'd kissed. That they would do more. *Not* more. Stuff that Harry didn't understand, had no experience with. Maybe even stuff that Harry hated... He felt his body tighten again, but not in reaction to Draco's touch.

What if he was terrible at sex? What if he *hated* it? From the quick glance at Seamus' book, it was clear that certain things weren't exactly comfortable. Would he be responsible for his own comfort, or would Draco... stretch him? Harry flushed just *thinking* the word; how was he going to handle Draco putting his fingers inside him?

"Good," he confirmed weakly. He tried to offer a smile, but his lips stuck to his teeth and it was a grimace instead.

"I can practically smell the worry on you," Draco said, his brows drawing together as he pulled back.

Harry breathed deeply, feeling better with more space. "This is all really new to me. Have you ever...?"

"Ever what?" Draco's hand stroked Harry's stomach, and his muscles clenched before relaxing under the gentle, non-sexual touch.

"Done this before? With a guy or girl?"

"Yeah."

Though he didn't want to admit it or examine it, Harry's stomach dropped below Draco's soothing fingers. "Which? Guy or girl?"

"Both." Draco sighed and stilled his hand, almost like he was holding Harry down. "The truth is, it's sort of in my nature to get that stuff out of the way when I'm young so that finding my mate is easier and I don't get restless later." He shrugged. "At least, that's what I read. I just think I was horny."

"So... a lot, then?"

"Depends on what you consider a lot. Enough that I won't hurt you, Harry."

Harry's eyes closed. He almost checked his own skin to make sure he wasn't really see-through. How could Draco know his thoughts and fears like that? It wasn't fair.

"I don't like to think that you were with other people," he admitted, even though it was stupid and immature and a little bit crazy, since this was Draco Malfoy he was talking about.

"I never thought of them as anything but practise. In my head, there was always this ideal, this perfect...for me, anyway...mate who would make everything... worth it."

"So you know what to do, then?" That, at least, was a relief.

"I do. Don't worry about that, little mate. I'll take care of you." Draco's grin was back. He seemed to smile a lot around Harry, which Harry liked.

"I've never done this..."

"I know that," Draco said. "And before you ask, I don't even know how. I just know. There are a lot of feelings like that. I know a lot about you without asking. Like how you wanted me to kiss you. And how you want me to do it again."

"So you want to do this tonight, then? Now?" The desire converging inside him and the anxiety threatening to overwhelm him were fighting a bloody battle.

As soon as Harry said the words, Draco's entire demeanour shifted. There was something feral, something basic about the way he was looking at Harry now. His eyes were almost lambent, and Harry couldn't look away.

"It has to be now," Draco said, his voice low and insistent. Practically a growl.

With that, Draco pushed Harry over onto his stomach, much like he had in the hospital bed. With a startled cry, Harry tried to lift himself up, but Draco's hand pressed between his shoulder blades and shoved him back down. Draco's fingers grazed the bite mark on Harry's back, and the pounding pleasure relaxed him enough to let Draco take control. He knew nothing of veela rituals; maybe this was part of it.

Without letting Harry up, Draco undressed him roughly, not even bothering to unbutton his trousers before yanking them from his hips.

"Hey!" Harry cried, half in protest, half in relief as his cock had more room to grow. There was no denying his arousal, even as his mind demanded better treatment.

Then Draco's cool hands were pulling his pants down, this time with less vigour. The air in the room was warm enough that his shiver was only situational, but Draco still rubbed his calves briskly as if to warm him up.

Harry was glad to be on his front...he'd never been naked in a sexual situation with anyone before. He was afraid his arousal would give him away, embarrass him. He pulled off his glasses and set them aside, now free to bury his face in the pillow to cool his heated cheeks.

"This is unexpected," Draco drawled, his hands now moving up Harry's legs and parting them so he could kneel between them.

"What?" Harry croaked. All he could think of was how much Draco could see in that position.

Skipping over his arse, Draco's hands started again at the small of his back, massaging, working their way to his tense shoulder muscles.

"How sexy you are," Draco said simply. There was a rustle of clothing and then a growling noise that was almost enough to frighten Harry before Draco draped the length of his body over Harry's.

It felt like there was *nothing* between them, not skin, not fear, nothing. They were a part of the same being. Harry's hands clenched on the bedclothes, unsure how to deal with the onslaught of emotion.

Then Draco sat up again. Harry turned to watch, resenting the lack of touch. Draco smoothed something slick onto his hand, tossing the bottle aside. *Lubricant*, Harry's helpful inner voice informed him, reminding him of the title of Chapter Seven of Seamus' book.

Draco's hands were almost clinical as they opened Harry, who had to look away. His heart was racing, but his erection was definitely flagging under the scrutiny and the embarrassment.

The first brush of Draco's slickened finger against his hole made Harry shout. *He knew* what to expect, in a sort of detached way, but the reality was almost too much. Shouldn't there have been more kissing, more touching? Less flipping Harry over and poking him?

The finger circled and stroked until Harry's abdomen unclenched and he let himself fall more naturally onto the bed. When Draco's fingertip pressed inside, the feeling was so foreign that Harry wanted to squirm right off the bed entirely. Draco's heavy, rhythmic breathing gave him something to focus on, so he matched their breaths as Draco continued to finger him.

"Okay?" Draco asked, shifting a little and nudging Harry's legs open wider.

Harry just nodded. In truth, though, he didn't really know if he was or not.

The difference between one finger and two was enough to make Harry gasp in discomfort. He waited for the intensity of the sensation to die, but it wouldn't...it wasn't until Draco's fingers began to move that the pain actually went away.

Having Draco's fingers inside him was *sostrange*. His hole felt hot and tight, stretched to the limit, though he knew from when he'd felt it against his arse in the hospital bed that Draco was significantly thicker. He would have to take that.

"God, Harry, you look amazing. Wish you could see..." Draco's voice was thick, one of his hands tightening on Harry's arse cheek as the other continued to prepare him.

Harry could *feel* Draco spreading his fingers, but he couldn't feel himself loosen any further. He didn't want to panic, but he didn't feel far from it.

Then Draco touched *something* and everything changed.

"Oh, god!" Harry cried, his arse pressing back against Draco's fingers. "Again."

Draco gave a chuckle that turned into a moan as Harry continued to move with the touch, seeking that flash of want again.

Chapter Four, Harry realised belatedly as Draco stroked that spot again. His prostate. He wished he'd had time to do more than read the chapter headings, but put together with Seamus' uninhibited talk and Harry's own sporadic sexual education, he was sure that was what it was.

With a sigh, echoed by Harry, Draco pulled his fingers out. Harry saw him reach for the lubricant again, heard him apply it to his cock. *This is the moment*, he thought to himself. Losing his virginity was a *big* deal, even more so because it was to another bloke.

"Harry, are you ready? I can't really wait..."

Hearing the strain in Draco's voice, Harry nodded. "It's okay." As long as Draco could get that spot again, Harry knew he could manage.

Draco heaved a sigh of relief and Harry felt his cock nudge at his hole. For a few very uncomfortable moments of pressure, nothing happened. Then Draco jerked his hips forward, and Harry cried out, feeling torn. He tried to move away instinctively, to get away from the pain, but Draco held him steady and continued to push into him.

"Draco, stop, stop," Harry said, panting. Draco's hands didn't let up on his hips, but at least he stopped moving. "I can't, I'm sorry. Fuck, *really* hurts."

Only the sound of heavy breathing answered Harry...that and the clenching of Draco's fingers, almost bruising.

"I'm sorry," Harry added in a small voice.

"If we don't do this, Harry..." Draco's voice was decidedly tight and he seemed to be struggling with the words. "If I don't finish...if *you* don't finish, for that matter, this whole thing... it won't work."

Even just remaining still, feeling his arse clamp around Draco's cock made pearls of pain spiral up his spine. "We'll try again. I don't know, later. Please, Draco." Even as he said it, though, he was afraid. Would he be able to do it again, knowing it hurt so much? Wouldn't it be easier to get it over with now and never do it again?

How would Draco feel, being mated to someone who he couldn't fuck?

Draco began to pull out, but then Harry had an idea.

"Use the charm. The veela allure or whatever. You said you could, right? Do it, Draco. Please. It's okay."

"I'm not doing that," Draco said, continuing to pull out until Harry's body was left twitching and empty.

"Why not?" Harry demanded as he gingerly turned onto his back. His flaccid cock lay rather sadly on his thigh, not even swelling a little as Draco stared at it. "I want you to. That makes it okay."

"It's like rape," Draco said, voice flat and encouraging no argument.

"No, it's not. It's like... just another preparation method, like lube and stretching. And *I want* you to do it. I want to be mated to you." Harry pulled Draco down beside him, wrapping his arms around Draco's neck and bringing their bodies in close. Harry was surprised to find Draco was still aroused. He moved his hand down and gently cupped Draco's sac, his thumb caressing the sensitive skin. "It's okay," he whispered.

Draco's eyes were glowing with some strange fire; Harry couldn't look away.

"I wanted your first time to be perfect. I wanted our first time together to be just right."

Harry sighed. "It's already too late for that. But I don't want to give up. Just use the charm and fuck me." He rolled his hips against Draco, his cock thickening a little at his crass words and the abstract idea of having sex with Draco.

When Draco kissed him, Harry was eager and quick to open his mouth, accepting Draco's tentative tongue. He was kissing like he wasn't sure he'd be allowed to, but Harry quickly disabused him of that notion, encouraging the kiss with little licks and nips of his own.

This time, Draco pushed him onto his back, settling between his thighs, their cocks trapped between their bellies. The kiss shifted from coaxing to demanding, and Harry was happy...probably too happy, he rather thought...to just submissively accept it.

"You smell so good, little mate," Draco whispered, his nose pressing against Harry's neck. He inhaled deeply, a sound akin to a purr rumbling from him.

Harry laughed and arched into the touch. Draco's hands were all over him again, and it was less frightening this time, face to face. When Draco's mouth moved to Harry's nipple, he cried out, shocked by how sensitive he was. Draco took note, circling the peak and blowing cool air over it, then taking it between his lips and squeezing before finally sucking it into his mouth. Harry moaned as Draco's teeth scraped against the tender flesh. His mind was further lost when Draco repeated the treatment on his other nipple. Harry's hands grabbed anything and everything he could, tugging at Draco's fine blond strands, digging his nails into Draco's back, pulling and pushing and demanding and surrendering all at once.

"Want more?" Draco asked with an almost cruel smile, sliding down Harry's body and hovering over his straining cock.

"Fuck, yes," Harry hissed, trying to jerk his hips up toward that vicious, loving mouth.

Having none of that, Draco held Harry down by the hips. He licked a stripe up Harry's desperate erection and then pulled back to see Harry's face. He had to close his eyes; it was too much. Draco, his mate, his lover... "Please," Harry said, not ashamed to beg.

"Since you ask so prettily," Draco said. He bent and took the head of Harry's cock into his mouth, immediately pressing his pointed tongue into the slit and making Harry thrash despite Draco's hold on his body.

Draco didn't seem to have the intent of making Harry come. He licked and nibbled, and when he sucked, it was only for a moment before letting up. His tongue pressed against the prominent vein on the underside of Harry's cock, the one his fingers would stroke when he wanked. Draco seemed to know everything about him, everything he liked, everything he hated; he seemed to do both in equal measure, drawing a near-sadistic pleasure from Harry's reactions.

Fingers grazed the still-sore rim of Harry's anus, and he whimpered a little until Draco's mouth moved to his balls, pulling the skin between his lips and tugging until Harry wanted to demand mercy. He almost didn't notice when the first finger slipped inside. When Draco didn't move the finger, Harry relaxed again, falling back into the pleasure of Draco's mouth all over him.

Even the second finger wasn't so bad, especially when Draco sought and found his prostate and gave Harry just enough to keep his mind off what was about to happen.

But he couldn't avoid it any longer when Draco rose over him, encouraging Harry's legs around his waist. Harry locked them behind Draco's back. He was nervous...afraid, almost...but he knew that the allure would take care of his pain. Or so he hoped, anyway. He actually had no real idea how it worked.

One of Draco's hands found its way beneath Harry's back, supporting his weight. Harry offered his mouth for a kiss, needing reassurance more than anything.

"I'm going to start now, okay?" Draco said after pressing a hard kiss to Harry's mouth.

"You're going to use the charm, right?" Harry hated the fear in his voice, but he couldn't mask it, not with everything else being so real.

Without answering, Draco seemed to concentrate, and a moment later, everything was less consuming. Harry had to close his eyes against the lightness; it was almost dizzying. The rational part of his brain was still somewhat intact; he could have asked Draco to stop if he'd needed to.

Probably.

It wasn't like the bite mark on his back. That was a more obedient sensation. It made Harry want to give everything up and let Draco bring him untold pleasures. This was less encompassing. Everything just felt... right. And Draco was really, *really* beautiful. Like... impossibly so.

"I defeated Voldemort," Harry said dreamily, smiling up at Draco, who laughed. That was good, making Draco laugh.

"Yes, and thank you for that," Draco said.

Somewhere beyond his immediate being, there was some discomfort. A pressure. *Sofull*. Burning. And then it just... went away.

Draco was so amazing. He made everything better. How had Harry ever caught such a specimen? How could he *ever* keep him? Harry was just some orphan; he wasn't particularly smart or even all that powerful, all things considered.

"I have a lot of money," Harry said hopefully.

"Shh, Harry," Draco murmured, his eyes strangely bright. He was moving on top of Harry, and Harry was moving too...they were moving together and that meant *they were* together. Harry had Draco for now...he was all his.

Then Draco slowed down, and they weren't moving together anymore. A brief flare of panic alit Harry's senses before he realised Draco was talking and *he really* should be listening.

"What?"

"I'm going to lift the allure."

"Oh, okay." *Wait*. "No!" But Harry couldn't remember *why* that was a bad idea. "Okay," he said again, uncertain.

The veil seemed to lift in sections. The last thing to come back to him was the pain in his arse. Actually, it hadn't come back at all. There was a soreness, sure, but his cock was rock-hard and though he felt Draco within him, it wasn't bad.

"Are you all right? Can I keep going?" Draco asked, looking strained.

It took Harry a second to realise he had to answer. "I'm okay, really."

Draco leaned over and kissed him, and the shift of angles brought Draco's cock right against his sweet spot, making him cry into Draco's mouth. Recognising what he'd done, Draco stayed in that position, rocking slowly. Harry looked up at him in wonder, amazed that Draco had done so much to get him ready and to make things good. He was glad Draco had removed the allure; this was something he wanted of his own free will.

Draco's hand was on his cock, tugging almost too harshly, but Harry rocked up into the grip, wanting to come. The pain of his first experience nearly forgotten, all that was left was his own desire to come, and the even stronger need to make Draco come.

"So good," Harry panted, still amazed. He leaned up for another kiss, letting Draco rule his mouth as they moved together as though they had for centuries.

The familiar tightening of his balls was almost unwelcome because it meant it had to end, but Harry knew, both intellectually and somewhere deep within his soul, that doing this with Draco now meant they could do it together *forever*.

It was that thought, even more than Draco's expert grip and steady thrusts that brought Harry over the edge, shouting out in abandon, uninhibited and unembarrassed.

When Harry opened his eyes, Draco was staring at him. *That* made him blush, and just when he'd thought himself incapable. To avoid scrutiny, Harry pulled Draco down for a kiss, his hands searching out Draco's firm arse, squeezing it in time with his thrusts.

Draco's climax was soundless, making Harry a little shy about the noise he'd made, but his face was scrunched up and adorable, his sharp white teeth biting an already red lower lip. When he was finished, he went limp enough that Harry gasped for breath, crushed.

He manoeuvred Draco off of him and curled up along his side. He was hot and tired and stiff and sore and wet... and he'd never felt so completely at home in his entire life.

After some time, it was apparent that Draco was actually sleeping and not just in some post-coital nirvana, so Harry pulled the sheets over them both. They'd be in trouble if they were caught, but now that he had Draco, that stuff wasn't really important.

"Good night," Harry said, chuckling at Draco's peaceful sleep-face. He went to lie on his back, but merciless arms reached and pulled him back, shifting him until he was laying half on top of Draco, his head resting on Draco's chest.

"G'night, little mate. And thank you."

Harry kissed the skin beneath his cheek before settling in. He didn't know what Draco was thanking him for, but he had the same, strange and giddy urge to thank him back.

Part Five of Six

Chapter 5 of 6

The war changed everyone. Harry comes back to eighth year knowing exactly what he wants, and unfortunately for him, so does Draco. Is it just Harry's imagination, or is his worst enemy harbouring a secret? Harry finds out about Draco's new side and *definitely* doesn't want to help. But it's not really up to him. (Veela fic)

Part V

The Room of Requirement apparently decided that Harry needed a wake-up call. A window that quite obviously didn't lead outside poured sunlight over him in the rudest way.

He slipped from the bed, careful not to wake Draco up. In the course of a mere day, their lives had drastically changed course. How to go about a normal life, now, knowing what he did and feeling how he did? He knew his feelings were real. Confused, definitely, but *real*. He could justify it however he wanted, but it didn't change what had happened. He'd given his entire life to someone he'd hated for as long as he'd known him.

Draco had said he wanted to make Harry happy, and Harry knew that had been the truth. But just because it was true didn't mean it was what Harry wanted...would Draco ever love him beyond what his veela instincts made him do? Harry would never know. Would he ever love Draco outside of his own need for someone to share his life with? Maybe he'd never know that, either. What kind of a relationship was based on that sort of ugly co-dependency?

Gathering his robes, Harry dressed, exercising an efficiency he wasn't usually capable of. His wand was under his pillow. Draco's arm was also under his pillow. Harry had slept on it. Approaching the bed, Harry felt beneath the pillow for the length of wood, careful to avoid Draco. Grasping it, he pulled it out and exhaled quietly.

At the door, he considered, again, waking Draco up. Telling him how scared he was, how much he needed it all to make sense. But Draco couldn't reassure him because the truth was, Draco *didn't* love him. Obviously. It had only been a *day*. But Harry's feelings were more than just not wanting to be alone. There was something about Draco, specifically, that had made rejecting him impossible.

Harry sighed. Draco slept so soundly. Harry had worried he would snore, but he was utterly silent. He did move a lot, though, but Harry had liked all the different ways they'd pressed together throughout the night.

Slipping through the door, Harry made it back to Gryffindor Tower having decided nothing. Not that there was a decision to make in the first place. But they'd done enough to keep Draco healthy. Maybe that was all that was needed. Harry had asked for more...hand-holding and the like...and Draco had agreed only because Harry wanted it. What did Draco want? Not Harry, surely. He'd been hoping Harry would reject him, after all.

So if Harry claimed not to want that stuff, Draco wouldn't feel forced into something he didn't want, and they could just go back to the way things were. Harry would have his life partner and Draco would have his mate.

And if it wasn't enough... Harry would *make* it enough.

Once in his dorm, he slipped into the showers, rinsing away the evidence of his night, though not the physical twinge that reminded him. He wouldn't spell that away. His cock began to thicken and rise at the memory of Draco above him, moving so sinuously, bringing a pleasure so sweet and hard it had to be fake...

No, there was no time for that. He wanted to get dressed before his dorm mates got into the shower, in case Draco had left any marks...not to mention the one mark he didn't want *anyone* to see.

Drying off quickly and dressing again, in clean clothes this time, Harry sat on his bed. What would happen after Hogwarts? Would they share a bed? Would Draco want to marry some witch and make an heir? Keep Harry on the side? A low rage roiled in his gut at the very idea. But Draco had mentioned not wanting to make veela babies with other veela; maybe that meant he didn't care about having kids.

Unable to stand the tension, Harry left the room just as Neville began to stir. He wanted to talk to Ron; he wanted to talk to Hermione. He ~~needed~~ to talk to Draco, he knew. He just couldn't quell the thought that whatever he said to his veela boyfriend would make him do whatever he could to make Harry happy instead of giving him real answers.

To his immense relief, Hermione was sitting at the Gryffindor table in the Great Hall, three books open before her as she brandished a pink hi-lighter with the air of someone wielding a great power.

"Harry," she said warmly with a smile for him as he sat down a little more gingerly than he might have liked.

"I wanted to thank you for your support. Of Draco and me." Harry eyed the toast but decided it could wait. His stomach hadn't quite settled yet.

"It's sort of my job to keep a level head when Ron's around," she said. She tugged her hair back into a messy ponytail, the elastic disappearing inside the mound of hair. "But the truth is, despite what I said... Harry, I'm worried about you. I've been reading up on this veela rejection thing...you said you couldn't manage to mean it. Why do you think that is?"

A little disappointed that he wasn't going to get the unconditional support he'd been hoping for, Harry said, "Well, since you obviously already know, why don't you tell me."

Hermione leaned forward. "It means you're afraid of spending the rest of your life alone, so instead of searching for the right person and risking heartache, you latched onto Draco because he made you feel less lonely."

"Well, don't pull any punches," Harry said, eyes wide. It was nothing more than he'd already figured himself, but hearing it from Hermione was rather like getting it from an encyclopaedia...introduced as fact.

"I'm sorry. I've never had one of my friends tie himself to his worst enemy because the idea of growing old alone terrified him more than Draco Malfoy."

Bitterness started to burn behind Harry's eyes, but he forced the feeling away. This was Hermione. She wasn't trying to hurt him. "What do you expect me to do? It's done."

"It's done?" she repeated, frowning. Then her eyes grew wide and she gave a soft gasp. "It's *done*. You two..." She waved her hand, blushing.

"Yeah, we definitely..." Harry repeated the action. "We also..." Another flourishing hand motion. "And we definitely..." A last, almost vulgar gesture.

Laughing, Hermione placed her hand over Harry's. He turned his palm-up and grasped hers, grateful for the reassurance.

"Still, I'm afraid that everything Draco says and does is because the veela in him wants to make me happy. How can I ever be sure of his sincerity?"

Hermione's hand tightened. "You can't be sure. Maybe if you'd given it some time before you jumped right in, but it is what it is. You have to take him at face value."

"How can I when he's always presented two faces to everyone?" Harry sighed, drawing his hand back. The toast was finally beginning to look appetising, so he slathered butter over a few slices and tucked in.

"So you two completed the claiming last night then? I can't believe he let you out of his sight!"

"What do you mean?" Harry asked, the words garbled around his mouthful.

Hermione's meaning became apparent when the Great Hall doors slammed open and Draco walked in amidst a swirling mist, veela features superimposed over his own like in the Herbology class.

The hall wasn't full, but there were enough students to make Draco's entrance cause a stir. Like before, though, no one seemed to notice anything unusual about Draco. Harry realised only he could see it when Draco went all veela.

Harry's stomach clenched in rebellion against the toast as Draco stormed forward, rage twisting his features. He grabbed Harry by the robes and hauled him out of his seat. Harry protested, but the translucent image of Draco's beak snapped at him, and it looked sharp enough, and real enough, that Harry shut his mouth.

Draco dragged Harry from the hall, his longer strides making Harry trip up. Hermione ran after them, yelling at Draco. As they passed through the doors, a third-year Ravenclaw asked Hermione if he should get the Headmistress, but Hermione said that she had it under control and not to tell anyone. Her voice carried across the hall, and Harry hoped she had enough clout as Head Girl to keep the rumours from circulating.

After veering off into an alcove, Draco slammed Harry against the wall, knocking the wind out of him.

"You're not hurt," Draco said in a low voice, his eyes narrowed as he took a long look down Harry's body. His hands were like claws on Harry's shoulders, pinning him to the wall.

From the corner of his eye, Harry could see Hermione hovering around the mouth of the alcove, looking anxious. "Well, *wasn't*," Harry snapped, rolling his shoulders and trying to get Draco's hands off of him.

"Then *why*," Draco said very slowly, "weren't you in the bed when I woke up?"

Hermione gave a squeak and Harry rolled his eyes. "Hermione, go on. We're fine here. Draco can't hurt me."

"It might be worth it," Draco countered, but low enough that Hermione couldn't hear.

"Are you sure? Because I've read..."

"Granger, *go*. This is between me and my mate."

Hermione's back straightened. "All right, but only because *Harry* asked me to, not you. And if you hurt him in any way..."

"I'm sure you'll make your displeasure known. Goodbye."

With a last uncertain look to Harry, Hermione walked away. The hallway was noiseless, most students still sleeping. Harry hoped whatever this new drama was would be wrapped up before people started filing past on their way to breakfast. The alcove was tucked away, but they weren't exactly hidden.

"What's your problem, Draco? I can't even get food by myself?"

"Not after a mating, you can't!" For the first time, Draco's anger seemed to flicker, and through it, Harry could tell he was really frustrated or hurt or... something.

"You keep telling me the rules after I break them. How was I supposed to know?"

Draco looked at Harry for a long time, long enough that Harry wanted to wave his hand in front of Draco's face to see if he was still receiving. Then Draco's eyes went dark, and he went melty...it was the only way to describe him. His stiffly held limbs lost all tension, his face relaxed into a seductive smile, his hands loosened their grip on Harry's shoulders and slid down his chest. He closed the gap between them until they were touching from knee to chest, and Draco's cheek pressed against Harry's as he whispered in his ear, "I wanted to have you again."

Harry's body reacted to the ministrations, but not enough to make him forget being thrown against a stone wall. "So you're angry because we didn't get to have sex again?"

Nodding, Draco continued, his voice a breathy whisper, warm and enticing. "I would have fed you breakfast, anything you wanted. I would have given you a massage until all your little aches went away...and I know you have them. I would have brought you whatever you wanted. Fuck, I would have done your homework." Draco's eyes went hard again as he looked at Harry. "I was supposed to *take care* of you! How can I do that when you're not there?"

"You can't expect me to just know this stuff, Draco. Either you tell me beforehand or you can't get upset when I make a mistake."

But Draco wasn't placated. "Everyone knows not to leave their lover in bed alone after the first time."

"It wasn't *your* first time," Harry felt compelled to point out, still a little sour about that fact.

"It was, though. In every way that mattered. And I hated that you weren't there. I wanted to... to do things for you."

Harry knew that was the veela part speaking, and it made Harry's insides twist up. The Draco part of Draco was probably glad Harry had hightailed it out of there before they'd woken up together.

"I'm sorry. You seem to forget I've never done this before."

Draco leered. "I didn't forget, my little virgin. Your reactions were way too unrehearsed, too natural."

"Whatever," Harry said, flushing and hating the rush of pleasure it gave him when Draco spoke to him like that. "So just tell me what else to expect, okay? I don't fancy getting pushed around like this."

"Oh, but Harry, I just love pushing you around..." Draco grinned and leaned in to lick Harry's neck.

"Cut it out and just *tell me!*"

Sighing, Draco pulled away, but he was still close enough that Harry could feel the tickle of his breath. "I'm going to want to touch you a lot. All the time. Not always sexually, but sometimes. I don't know how long that stage will last; it's different for everyone. And you can't let other people touch you, especially men."

"No, that's not an okay rule. Most of my friends are guys and I'm not going to tell them not to horse around with me or clap me on the back or anything. You're being ridiculous."

"It's not *me!*" Draco protested. At Harry's raised eyebrow, he relented. "All right, some of it is. But it's *not all* me. You just don't want to make a veela jealous. You don't want to make *me* jealous."

A part of Harry realised there was something important in that distinction, but he was too busy getting worked up over the idea that he'd never enjoy human touch from anyone but Draco for the rest of his life.

"How about this...I won't touch any males in any way except Ron or except in an emergency. What other blokes decide to do with their hands is not my call. I'm not going to tell people off for it, and neither are you."

Draco narrowed his eyes. "So you won't agree to what I want, but you try to make me agree to not stop people from touching you. It doesn't work that way, little mate. If someone touches you, I *will* stop it."

Suddenly Harry felt very tired. He let his head fall back against the wall, uncaring that the stone jabbed him unkindly. He wanted to give in and just let Draco do whatever he wanted. But an even bigger part of him, a more familiar part, made Harry want to rail and fight until Draco gave in to him as Harry always seemed to give in to Draco.

Remembering something Draco had said while he'd had Harry docile and compliant in the Great Hall the day before, Harry said, "Didn't you say going public was part of the deal?"

Draco nodded. His eyes were still focused and fixed on Harry, which led Harry to believe that Draco hadn't forgotten the previous conversation and wasn't likely to anytime soon. "Veela are proud creatures," Draco said, standing up a little taller and sneering when Harry rolled his eyes. "We like to show off what's ours."

"Sounds more like making sure no one else makes a move on me."

"Yes, well, that too. I don't like the way that Weaslette looks at you. I thought you said you came out."

"I did!" Harry said. "Ginny's fine. We were each other's first love. That sort of thing is hard to put away quickly. I had an easier time because I'd been pulling away for almost the entire time we were together."

"You loved her, then." It wasn't a question.

Harry braced himself for wings, claws, and beak, but none came. "Yeah, I did. And I still do, but as a friend. Draco, don't do the jealousy thing now, please. I've had enough of it today."

Breathing deeply, Draco seemed to centre himself. "Just tell me one thing."

"All right."

Draco's lips met Harry's in a sweet kiss, exploring, not demanding. His tongue didn't venture out, his teeth didn't bare. It was just an easy, slow kiss, the kind that could become heartbreakingly familiar over the years, bringing them back again and again to this stolen moment.

"Am I a better kisser than she is?"

Harry groaned.

*

Draco's method of coming out as Harry's boyfriend was not quite what Harry had envisioned.

He'd pictured Draco getting up in the middle of dinner and announcing to the entire school that Harry was his, and hands off. The idea of it both made Harry's head ache and his heart pound. He wasn't a fan of Draco's jealousy, but the possessiveness, while annoying, touched something inside him. Draco wanted Harry all to himself. Draco *wanted* him. Harry didn't think his self-esteem was bad enough to warrant actually enjoying being lorded about like that; maybe it was just the way he was.

The Slytherins seemed to know first. It was a slow discovery, but over the course of the next week, Harry realised that, somehow, they knew. The way they looked at Harry, the way they sat even farther from Draco while still showing an almost fearful respect... Draco had told them.

If Draco had *only* told his housemates, it might have happened that no one else would even know about it. The Slytherins were notoriously close-mouthed about in-house business. Of course, that wouldn't suit Draco's needs. The Ravenclaws were next.

There were a lot of Slytherin-Ravenclaw friendships, especially in the lower years. News spread that way, and because the Ravenclaws were less afraid of Draco and more friendly with Harry, they didn't have any problem actually asking Harry. Knowing better than to deny it, and not really wanting to anyway, Harry had confirmed the rumours for the first time on his way to Herbology.

With Harry's confirmation, the rumour mill kicked into high gear. Still, the Gryffindors didn't know and Harry wanted them to find out from him.

But because he was tired of coming out, one way or another, he asked Hermione to handle it.

Handle it she did. When Harry walked into the common room a few hours after, having wasted time in the library wondering whether anyone had ordered his commitment to an insane asylum, Harry immediately knew that Hermione had threatened his housemates to be accepting. Not a single person spoke out against Harry's new relationship. It wouldn't have really mattered if they had, but it was still nice to be able to relax. The worst was over.

Or so he'd thought.

Somehow, the Hufflepuffs were the absolute worst of the bunch, and not because they were judgemental or cruel.

For some reason, they were absolutely in love with the idea that Harry and Draco were dating. He'd even heard the term 'star-cross lovers' bandied about, though Hermione had sternly ground that to a halt with a quick lesson on how that particular story had ended. Draco and Harry even had Hufflepuff groupies, as Draco called them, following them around in hopes of seeing... Harry didn't even want to know what.

But as the days and weeks passed, people got used to the idea of seeing them together. They weren't obvious in their relationship, not even holding hands except under the table during the rare dinners Draco spent with the Gryffindors.

Ron hadn't *quite* come around to the idea. The problem seemed to be that Harry was claiming Draco had changed, yet around Ron and Hermione, he was his old vitriolic self again. There was almost none of that sweet, almost romantic Draco that Harry had become familiar with during their time alone. Ron bore the company with the grace of a Weasley...that was to say, hardly any grace at all...and Hermione pushed too hard and too fast for complete reconciliation on all parts.

There was a part of Harry that he was holding back from Draco, and the effort of doing so made him feel sick. He wasn't used to not giving all of himself, especially to someone he was dating. When he'd been with Ginny, before things had become strained, he'd held nothing back. Being free with his emotions, his heart, made Harry feel human, connected. Keeping that to himself instead of sharing it felt plain *wrong*. Still, he couldn't bring himself to give up that last shard when there was no way he could know if *Draco* wanted it.

Harry had fallen for Draco, the wizard. But it had been the veela who'd fallen for Harry.

*

"How excited are you for the Hogsmeade weekend?" Ron asked, excitement warming his tone despite the fact that Draco was present.

It was an unaccountably warm Thursday in November, and Harry, Draco, Ron, and Hermione were taking advantage of it by sitting outside by the lake. Time had passed more quickly than should have been possible. Even though Harry's life had changed drastically and permanently, nothing was really different except for the regular presence of Draco and the very regular sex.

Or, almost sex. Sex without actual *fucking* still counted as sex, he was sure. He certainly counted it. After the first time, Draco hadn't pressed for that kind of sex again, and despite the fact that Draco had made it good for him, Harry hadn't encouraged it, either. He wanted to do it again. Mostly. But the other stuff was so good, and Draco really didn't seem to mind... It was possible that Draco didn't *like* anal sex. In Seamus' book, which Harry had had ample opportunity to peruse since he'd first been given it, it said that many gay men did not engage in regular anal sex, even with long-term partners. It seemed like Draco was that type. And that was fine.

Really.

In response to Ron's question, Harry shrugged. It wasn't cold enough to make him dread the walk, but it just didn't hold the same mystery and excitement as it had when everything had been new. It would also be the first time he and Draco appeared in public...in the real world, as Harry thought of the world outside Hogwarts...together.

Would there be hand-holding?

Harry hated that his mind was so stuck on that idea.

No one else answered either: Hermione was working on their Transfiguration homework and Draco usually didn't answer Ron's questions. Taking pity, Harry said, "I hope it doesn't snow."

"I hope it does. I reckon I know a couple people who could be taken down a notch with a good, old-fashioned snowball fight."

Though Draco didn't look at Ron, he said, "Try it, Weasley, and you will regret your birth."

Ron rolled his eyes, looking to Harry for support. That was the worst...being caught in the middle. He gave Ron a weak smile.

"I'm not going, anyway," Draco announced, looking at his nails.

"You're not?" Harry asked, surprised. He tried not to let his disappointment show on his face. After all, he was the one keeping the relationship at arm's length. Still, though, was it too much to ask to be seen together in a way that was obviously more than friends? In his imagination, he'd always pictured himself as the publically affectionate type. Not to the point of making other people uncomfortable, but definitely kissing and, yes, hand-holding in public. Harry loved what they did in private, but when Draco'd said he'd need to touch Harry a lot, Harry had thought that would mean more than just during their time alone.

"Can't be bothered. There's nothing I need and I wanted to work on my Potions essay."

"Yes, sucks to have to actually work for your grade now that Snape..."

"Ron!" Harry shouted, knowing how Draco felt about his former Head of House and surprised by Ron's coldness, given what they knew about Snape. "Just stop it. If you...and you, too, Draco...can't be civil, I'll just leave."

"I am completely fine with that, Harry," Draco said snidely, glaring at Ron. He looked a little pale, so Harry knew the barb about Snape had hurt.

"Oh, grow up," Hermione said, slamming her book down. She turned to Ron. "You are being ridiculous. Draco *apologised*, and for things he didn't even personally do, but that the people he associated with did. We don't take credit for our friends' achievements, so why should he have taken blame for their crimes? He didn't have to, but he did, and he was sincere. If you can't get past that, you're going to lose Harry as a friend." Draco was next under her gaze. "Stop being so difficult to get along with. If you're horrible all the time, we're never going to get to know the you that Harry knows, and this fighting will never stop, and *that* will make Harry miserable because he feels torn between you and us."

Harry was about to thank her when she caught him in her sights. "And you! Why are you moping around all the time? Isn't this what you wanted? I won't say I told you so about jumping in too quickly, but you're acting like you've been forced to do something, when in reality, *you* chose this! So embrace it or just... just stop!"

With eyes wide all around, Ron, Draco, and Harry all stared at Hermione, who huffed and went back to her homework.

Surprisingly, Draco was the first to speak. "Loath as I am to admit it, Granger..."

Hermione cleared her throat.

Draco's eye twitched. "Hermione is right. *Ronald*, I apologise for making your life more difficult on purpose. I shall endeavour to stop, as much as it may pain me. Harry, I'm sorry for putting you in that position."

"Yeah, Harry, I'm sorry, too. And you, too... Draco."

Harry couldn't help the grin the split his face. "And I'm sorry if I've been weird lately. I'll work on that."

The silence that followed was companionable for the first time ever.

"Can I talk to you?" Draco asked Harry some time later, his voice lowered.

"Of course. Do you want to take a walk?"

Draco nodded, rising. He helped Harry to his feet.

"We're going to walk for a bit. See you two at dinner."

Ron and Hermione waved them off, looking grateful to have their own time together.

"Let's go to the library. I wanted to check for this book comparing potions and alchemy."

"Sure." They walked without speaking, but finally, Harry had to ask. "Why aren't you coming to Hogsmeade?"

Draco shrugged. "I don't know if you noticed, but my standing in Slytherin isn't exactly impressive at the moment. Hardly any of my old friends came back and the younger years aren't impressed with me, to say the least. And I'm certainly not going with *your* friends."

"Yeah, I did notice, Draco, thanks for thinking I've the observational skills of a niffler. And why wouldn't you come with us?"

"I just don't want to deal with the media, okay? Having them say that I'm using you three to get back in the Ministry's good graces or something stupid like that."

"If it was just you and me, would that make a difference?" Harry didn't exactly want to, but he hated to think of Draco alone while they went without him.

"Well, it wouldn't make a difference to the *Daily Prophet*, no, but it would make me more eager to go."

Harry bit his lip. "Next time, all right? I can't change my mind now and go with you, instead. But you *would* come with us. I promise it won't be as bad as you think it will, especially now that Hermione's got us all tucking tail."

"Don't worry about me. I always find ways to entertain myself."

With a heavy heart, Harry pulled open the library door and entered after Draco. Why couldn't he just say that it would mean a lot if Draco came with them? He was sure that if Draco knew how important it was, he would do it.

Harry followed Draco around, feeling rather like a puppy, while Draco scoured the shelves for his book.

"Damn," he muttered a few minutes later, looking defeated. "Stay here. I'm going to go ask Pince."

Hermione had been right, Harry thought as he scraped absently at the scarred wood of the shelf he was leaning against. Harry had wanted this, whether consciously or not. He hadn't been able to mean the rejection, so that meant some part of him knew that Draco was what he wanted. After all the time they'd spent together, Harry could no longer fool himself into thinking it was merely the idea of being with someone that shaped his feelings for Draco. Maybe at first. Definitely at first, really. But he'd gotten to know Draco too well to be able to say he couldn't love him.

What did he gain by continuing to hold back? That wasn't what *he* wanted. He wanted a relationship like Ron and Hermione's, where they could be affectionate in public, where they didn't fight all the time. He wanted everyone...not just Hogwarts...to know that Harry was with Draco. That Draco was his as much as he was Draco's. It really didn't seem too much to ask, in the grand scheme of things. Just a little love.

Love.

Harry hissed as a sliver slid beneath his thumbnail. He popped the tip of his finger into his mouth, the copper tang of his own blood making his nose twitch.

"Didn't you outgrow that like most normal wizards?" Draco's familiar, teasing drawl made Harry's mind up for him.

He'd only been hurting himself, pulling away from Draco, who hadn't even noticed. Why deny himself what he wanted because he was afraid Draco didn't? Draco *was* the veela. There was no separating the two. For all Draco referred to his 'veela side' and Harry blamed things on veela-ness, the two sides were inextricably linked. The veela loved Harry, so Draco must, too. Or would, eventually. But not if Harry didn't give him a chance.

Feeling like he'd finally shrugged the world from his shoulders, Harry grabbed Draco by the front of his robes and spun him around, pushing him against the shelf of books that lined the back wall of the library.

Without giving Draco a chance to recover, Harry slammed his mouth onto Draco's, merciless in his sudden need *Why* had he pushed this away? They'd been intimate countless times since the first, but this was the first time Harry had taken the initiative, the first time Harry had ever kissed back harder than he was being kissed. He wanted to show Draco, with every swipe of his lips and tongue, that he *meant* this relationship. That maybe he'd messed it up for the past months, but things were different now. He'd make it up to Draco.

Draco seemed too surprised to respond at first, but Harry didn't care. He pressed the length of his body against Draco's, moaning when there was an answering hardness to his own.

Harry couldn't stop grabbing and touching: Draco's hips to bring them together, his arms, his neck, tangling in his hair. Draco was finally reacting, and it was almost as violent as Harry's first attack.

"God, yes, please..." Draco murmured against Harry's eager mouth.

Harry let Draco turn them so his back was against the shelves, and it wasn't entirely comfortable, but he easily made do with Draco's body pressing against his front.

Draco's mouth moved to Harry's neck, but Harry whispered, "No, kiss me." He didn't want this to be foreplay. He just wanted the kiss...his kiss, his first ~~steal~~ kiss...to last forever.

With a somewhat puzzled look, Draco lowered his mouth to Harry's again. Like Harry, his hands were everywhere, as if he, too, knew how different this was than the other snogs they'd shared since the claiming.

Eventually, the flash-fire of the kiss turned to ember, enough to nourish and not destroy. Draco's hand on the back of Harry's neck guided the kiss how he wanted, and even though Harry'd started it, now he was content to let Draco do the ruling. He'd made his point.

"Where was this?" Draco asked, leaning his forehead against Harry's, his breath fast and warm against Harry's wet lips.

Harry just shook his head. He didn't want Draco to know the extent to which he'd been holding back. It hurt to think of the time wasted because he'd been afraid. It was unlike him. He was the fool that rushed in. Moderation wasn't in his nature.

"More," Harry said, encircling Draco's neck with his arms. His back arched off the wall, bringing them into even closer contact. A part of Harry...a very insistent part...wanted to just rut against Draco until he found completion, but this kiss... it was special. He knew he'd never forget it.

"This isn't going to go away, is it? This is what I've wanted. How do I keep it?" Draco looked so sincere, so insistent, that Harry hated himself for not giving in before.

"It's yours, just take it." *From now on, I promise.*

Then Draco's tongue was back in Harry's mouth, slow and searching, tasting and testing. Harry's fingers gripped Draco's hair in a way that had to be painful, and Draco might have objected if his own hand wasn't tugging at Harry's strands at the same time.

A startled gasp from behind Draco only just brought them back from the world more beautiful. With dazed eyes, Harry looked beyond Draco's shoulder to see a redheaded Hufflepuff girl staring at them with wide eyes.

Before he could come up with some half-arsed excuse, Draco hissed at the poor first year, and she let out a cry and tore off down the aisle, not looking back once.

"Hufflepuffs," Draco snapped, eyes blazing. But his anger was undermined by the redness of his kiss-swollen lips.

"We should go before she tells the older ones and they bring cameras and notepads."

"I wasn't finished with you," Draco whispered, the fire in his eyes heated by a different source.

"I'm not going anywhere," Harry reassured him, knowing, maybe for the first time, that it was wholly true.

Part Six of Six

Chapter 6 of 6

The war changed everyone. Harry comes back to eighth year knowing exactly what he wants, and unfortunately for him, so does Draco. Is it just Harry's imagination, or is his worst enemy harbouring a secret? Harry finds out about Draco's new side and *definitely* doesn't want to help. But it's not really up to him. (Veela fic)

Part VI

Even the slush on the ground couldn't keep Harry from walking on clouds. He had a silly grin on his face and knew it, but every time he tried to keep it in check, a moment later it was stretching over his features again.

"What's got you in such a good mood?" Hermione asked, nudging him with her shoulder and giving him a rather salacious look.

"Just had a good talk with Draco," Harry said, flushing a little as he realised how few words there had really been.

"And by good talk, you mean...?" Hermione waggled her eyebrows and smirked.

"Hermione!" Ron wailed, grabbing her around the waist and spinning her so he was between her and Harry, ostensibly to keep her from Harry's corrupting influence, even though Harry suspected it was more the other way around.

"What? I'm just glad our best friend is actually happy! I was really worried."

Ron ruffled her hair with a fluffy mitten, causing it to explode from its bun with enough static electricity to power Hogwarts.

"Things are really good. He almost never gets jealous anymore. I haven't seen his beak in weeks..."

"And isn't that something you never thought you'd say," Ron mumbled.

"...And I'm really looking forward to what happens after Hogwarts."

"What does happen after, mate? Guess we won't be getting a flat together, eh?"

Hermione cleared her throat and then covered her head when she saw Ron's heavy hand coming back for further destruction.

"Guess not. You'll be with Hermione, anyway, right?"

"Yeah, that's right."

His friends gave each other a look so saccharine Harry doubted he'd ever be able to pull it off with Draco. But the very thought brought a renewed lightness to his step.

He and Draco hadn't spoken about it much, but he knew Draco didn't want to live at Malfoy Manor, even after the year's probation was up, and Harry definitely didn't want to stay at Grimmauld Place, which meant they'd be looking for a place of their own. In a few months, Harry would be applying for the Auror programme, and though Draco hadn't decided quite what he wanted as a career, he was supportive of and unsurprised by Harry's choice. And whatever Draco wanted to do, Harry would be happy with as long as Draco was happy, too.

They made the usual rounds of Hogsmeade, first warming up in the Three Broomsticks with a few butterbeers that Harry wished he could have shared with Draco. Then Hermione went off to Scrivenshaft's Quill Shop for a refill of her red ink and Harry and Ron headed to Zonko's, Ron commenting on how much more impressive George's store was.

When they were finished in the joke shop, Ron's wallet significantly lighter due to 'research for George', they waited outside Honeydukes for Hermione. When she finally finished, walking up with a bag too large to contain only an ink pot, they all entered the sweets shop and made their way through the typical Hogwarts crowd.

Harry wanted to get something for Draco. He couldn't keep his mind off the amazing kiss in the library, made even more amazing by the fact that it had been *only* a kiss. Draco didn't ever *push* Harry, but he made no secret of the fact that he wanted more and more. And Harry had no problem with that; quite the contrary, he found he was very nearly addicted to Draco's touches. This time, though, Draco hadn't suggested they head up to the Room of Requirement. He hadn't even copped a feel beneath Harry's t-shirt or anything. He almost would have been afraid that Draco didn't want him if it hadn't been for Draco's persistent erection and the fact that the kiss had contained enough fire to consume them both, given time.

Draco seemed like the type for something expensive. Obviously. He wouldn't want Chocolate Frogs or liquorice wands.

Feeling nervous, Harry approached the counter. A young witch sat on a stool, looking bored as she tapped her nails on the countertop and read a magazine.

"Er, Miss?"

"Yeah?" she answered without looking up.

"I want to buy something special. Something... really classy. Could you recommend something?"

The clerk finally looked at Harry. She startled, seeing who he was, and hopped off her perch. "Harry Potter," she breathed with unconcealed reverence.

Harry was reminded that the world outside Hogwarts was still interested in him. He wondered when that would change. With a sigh, he gave a tight smile and nodded. "It's for someone I care about," he clarified, hoping that was enough.

"Oh, that's so *sweet*!" she gushed. From beneath the counter she pulled a fancy-looking catalogue, flipping to the back pages and pushing it toward him. "These are our deluxe, special edition chocolate compilations. Any young lady would be *thrilled* to receive them."

From her eager smile, Harry knew she was speaking from personal experience. He glanced down at the photos of different chocolate boxes. They all seemed really girly: red and pink, decorated with lace and ruffles. He flipped the page, knowing he couldn't get Draco anything like that if he wanted to keep his balls.

On the last page, however, was something very intriguing. A plain black rectangular box with a simple silver ribbon. The moving photo showed the box opening to reveal exquisite looking chocolates, all perfectly decorated and proportioned. It looked expensive, it looked pretentious...it looked perfect for Draco.

"That," he said, pointing to the box and sliding the catalogue back.

The young woman looked disappointed. "Are you sure?" She flipped back a page and indicated a bright orange box with two hippogriffs on it. "This is so much cuter!"

But Harry shook his head. "The black one, please."

With a pout, the clerk disappeared into the back room. While he waited, Hermione came up to the counter, looking breathless.

"I can't believe how busy it is! Everyone must be shopping for Christmas already."

Harry's satisfaction at having found the perfect surprise gift for Draco dwindled. "What am I supposed to get Draco for Christmas?" he said, groaning.

"Oh, don't worry about that! Draco seems like the type to tell you exactly what he wants."

Harry had to smile at the miles of layers to that statement. That was how he'd gotten Harry, after all. "You're absolutely right."

The clerk came back with the black box of chocolates. It looked ever better up close...the box seemed to be made of wood and lacquered. It was perfect.

"Oh, is that for Draco?" Hermione cried, practically swooning.

The woman behind the counter's eyes grew huge and she looked between Harry, Hermione, and the box for a long moment.

Uncaring what she thought, Harry said, "You think he'll like it?"

Looking numb, the woman wrapped the box in tissue and placed it in a fancy paper bag with handles.

"Thirteen Galleons," the woman said in a weak voice.

"Thirteen Galleons?" Hermione gasped.

Harry just paid the exorbitant price, thrilled with his purchase. "Have a nice day," he said, knowing that the knowledge of his and Draco's relationship just became public knowledge if it hadn't been already.

Waiting outside the store for Hermione and Ron, who were waiting in the line that had grown while he'd been looking for the perfect gift, Harry wondered how Draco would react. They'd never bought gifts for each other before. He wondered if there would be a lot of that in the future. He knew he planned on spoiling Draco. He had more than enough money to do so, and he knew he'd grow addicted to spending it on Draco if the rush he felt at that moment was any indication.

Harry waved at Seamus and Dean as they walked up. "What have you got there?" he teased, nodding at Dean's Gladrag's bag.

Dean rolled his eyes. "A scarf for my cousin. She doesn't understand that wizarding fabric is no different from Muggle fabric. I think she thinks it'll turn her into a witch."

"Quite the line," Seamus remarked, nodding at Honeydukes. "I went there first. Everyone saves it for last. Not me, though. Oh, Harry..." Seamus dug through his back and fished out a lollipop, handing it to Harry. "I saw this and thought of you. Something for your oral fixation."

"Oh, fuck off," Harry said good-naturedly, taking the sweet. He unwrapped it and popped it into his mouth, his mind on kissing Draco with sweet-tasting lips.

"Hey, I thought Draco wasn't coming," Dean said.

"He's not." Harry didn't want to sound sulky, but he was still sore over the whole thing.

Dean raised an eyebrow and jerked his head in the direction behind Harry. Harry turned just in time to see Draco's hand come up and snatch the lollipop from his mouth and toss it on the frosty ground.

"Oi, I paid good money for that!" Seamus cried.

"You," Draco said. "Finnigan. Get the fuck out of here and don't ever bother Harry again."

"Er, he wasn't bothering me, he's my friend," Harry protested.

"We'll be going," Dean said, tugging Seamus behind him.

Over his shoulder, Seamus called to Harry, "Don't let him treat you like that, mate!"

"It's a good thing I decided to come and see if I could find that book here. Come with me," Draco said. Harry'd never heard his voice so low, so tight. It sounded like every iota of strength was going toward keeping himself in check.

Draco grabbed Harry's arm, but Harry jerked it away. "I'll come, but don't manhandle me, Draco. I'm not a child."

Sneering, Draco led them both behind Honeydukes. They were hidden from sight and far enough that no one could hear what promised to be an explosive fight.

"How dare you," Harry growled, rubbing at his mouth. Draco's quick grabbing of the sweet had scraped his lip.

"No," Draco said, backing Harry against the brick wall of the shop. "How dare *you* take a gift from another contender."

"A contender? What the hell is that?"

"Are you not happy with me? You've never asked for anything from me; you've never indicated that you needed something."

"I don't! I am happy, yes. Draco, what are you on about?" Harry hated having his back against the wall, but he wasn't scared or angry enough to pull his wand.

"Finnigan is gay," Draco said, seeming to think that explained everything.

"I know that. He's been really supportive, actually, ever since I came out."

Draco's lips curled away from his teeth, which seemed sharper all of a sudden. There was the briefest flicker of a beak over Draco's furious features.

"I'll just bet he has. So now you're taking gifts from other gay men. What, are you playing the field a little? Not satisfied with me, you want more?"

"It was a fucking joke!" Harry shouted. He pushed at Draco's chest, but Draco came even closer, pressing against Harry in a parody of their library kiss.

"Not to me." Draco's hands closed on Harry's shoulders. "Taking a gift from a potential mate is like cheating."

"First of all, Seamus isn't a fucking veela, so he can't very well be a mate, can he? Is this another one of your random veela rules that you don't tell me until it's too fucking late?"

Draco seemed to be curled around Harry, caging him against the wall, even breathing his air. Tension was a tangible thing, evident in every tight line of his body. His hands were trembling, probably with the effort not to clamp down on Harry's shoulders as he usually did when he went all veela.

"Did you know this rule before?" Harry asked quietly. It seemed like Draco was as surprised by his reaction as Harry. He'd said before that his veela side went almost entirely by instinct, so it made sense that he couldn't exactly predict this sort of behaviour.

Ignoring the question, Draco said, "Tell me you're not thinking about leaving me."

Disbelief warred with anger, and Harry just shook his head. "I'm not thinking about leaving you. I haven't thought that, not for a second. It was a stupid joke gift that meant nothing. You *know* that."

Draco's kiss was sudden and violent. The back of Harry's head hit the brick wall, and he made a protesting noise, but it drowned in Draco's mouth. The kiss went on and on, and it was *nothing* like the one from the day before. It was hard and claiming and all about teaching a lesson.

Harry turned his face away, his lips feeling bruised and swollen. "Fuck you, Draco," he said in a low voice.

There were flickers of beak again and then Draco's finger touched Harry's lower lip. A razor-sharp talon cut down the centre of Harry's lip with grim determination. "Now I'll know if someone else kisses you," Draco said in a voice not his own.

"Stop!" Harry shouted, the sharp pain shocking him. He felt blood trickle down his chin. He pulled his wand and trained it on his boyfriend, whose hand...without claws now...were held to his own mouth, his eyes wide. He looked smaller than he had a moment before.

"Harry..." Draco backed up, hands raised in supplication. "I didn't mean..."

Shaking his head in disbelief, Harry said, "I've had enough of being marked by monsters who wanted to own everything around them." He spat out the blood that had spilled into his mouth and walked away.

He was halfway to the castle before he realised he must have dropped Draco's present.

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"Here it is," Hermione said, indicating the line of text with a bitten fingernail.

"Just give me the gist of it, please," Harry said. He'd tossed his glasses aside to rub at his temples. Being mated was a huge pain in his arse...not to mention his lip. The cut was shallow but sore as hell, the way a cat scratch seemed to hurt more than it really should. They hadn't been able to heal it, being a magical wound rather like Bill Weasley's scars.

"Accepting an offering from a rival contender for the mate's affections, whether veela, Muggle, or magical, signifies the mate is interested in other prospects. The veela will go to great lengths to win back the mate, through avenues that might seem primitive to the outsider."

"Yeah, like marking his property," Ron grumbled. He was sitting back in his chair with his arms crossed over his chest. "I knew something like this would happen."

"That's not helpful, so stop it or leave," Hermione said with a frown. "This isn't about you."

"What am I supposed to do?" Harry asked. "This can't keep happening. I need to know everything *before* it happens. And he needs to curb his instincts."

"Well, the best thing to do would be to read as much as you can. I know Draco said there is limited information, but it's obviously *not* that limited if we can find it in the library."

"I can't believe how calm you're being about this, Hermione," Ron said. "Draco made Harry *bleed*. How much does he have to do before you realise this is madness?"

Hermione sighed. "It's like getting mad at a lion for eating meat. It's in Draco's nature. You both just need to be more accepting of that nature. Draco's not going to change, and you're his mate. Push him away and he'll suffer."

"I'm suffering!" Harry said, and he didn't mean the cut on his lip. He wondered where Draco was. He was so confused.

And then Draco was there, standing beside Hermione's chair and looking at Harry. His eyes fell on Harry's lip, and he winced. Harry squeezed his lips together. Let him suffer.

"Can I talk to you?" Draco said.

Just the day before, he'd asked the same thing. They'd walked to the library. They'd kissed. It would have been Harry's favourite memory of them, only it had to be ruined the next day.

"I don't think so!" Ron snapped, eyes narrowed.

After looking at Draco for a long moment, Harry nodded. "It's okay," he said to Ron, who huffed and stalked away.

Hermione rose as well. She treated Draco to a glare that would have made even Snape wither, and Draco seemed to shrink under it. Hermione gave Harry's shoulder a squeeze as she passed.

To his relief, Draco took Hermione's seat across from him. He didn't want Draco too close to him at the moment.

"I can heal it," Draco said, looking at the table. "But it takes... saliva."

Harry's laugh was hard to his own ears. "You're kidding, right? A magical kiss to solve all my woes?"

Draco's lips twitched when Harry laughed, but then he was solemn again. "It's supposed to be symbolic. I heal it with a kiss to show that I trust you, that you chose me."

"Well, that would be a lie, then." Draco's face lost all blood, and Harry quickly added, "That you trust me, I mean." Swallowing, he reached across the table and took one of Draco's cold hands. "I will *not* reject you. I choose you. I did, I do, I always will." He bit his lip, forgetting, and he hissed. "But I don't forgive you."

Draco took Harry's hand and pressed it to his own face, leaning into the touch and squeezing his eyes closed. Beneath his fingers, Harry felt wetness.

"I seem to say this a lot," Draco whispered. "But I'm sorry. I'm so sorry."

"Just... tell me it's not going to be like this forever. These ups and down are too much. I just want something..." Easy? Normal? No, he didn't expect that, not with Draco and not with a veela. "I need you to trust me."

"I want to. I *do*. And then I see something like that... I get so scared."

"Haven't I proven to you that it's *you* I want?" Harry asked, shaking his head. "Haven't I shown you that there's no one who could ever come close?"

"Yes," Draco whispered. He moved Harry's hand to his mouth, where he kissed the palm and every fingertip. "I can't excuse it. But it's hard to know that we're together just because you didn't want to be alone."

"It's more than that now." Harry smoothed his hand over Draco's warming cheek, then into his hair at the back of his neck. "It's so much more."

"For me, too," Draco said, his grey eyes unguarded for once.

"So, we're mates, and that's official, but... do you want to be my boyfriend? Would you, without all this?"

"Yes."

"And that's Draco speaking, not the veela? You're not trying to make me happy?"

"I don't seem to be very good at that when I *do* try," Draco said with a rueful smile. "Yes, Harry, it's just me speaking. I want you. The veela is in me, a part of me, like the mate is a part of you. But we're more than that, or we should be. Forget all the other stuff. Harry, yes, I want to be your boyfriend."

Harry stood and took the seat beside Draco, facing him. "This drama has to stop," Harry warned.

Draco smiled. "I didn't believe you before."

"What?"

"I wanted to, but I couldn't. I mean, you're Harry Potter. You save people, even people like me. And how could I believe it was real when I knew you only wanted me so you wouldn't be alone? I felt like my hold on you was so tenuous I had to continually reinforce it."

"And now?"

Draco reached out slowly, watching Harry's face as if to make sure he wouldn't be turned away. Harry nodded, and Draco touched Harry's neck, lightly enough to be reminiscent of a kiss.

"Now I believe you. It's really true."

"It's really true," Harry confirmed, smiling. *This*, this was what he'd wanted. Not just someone to occupy the space at his side, but someone to share his life with, share everything with.

"I think I might love you," Draco whispered. His eyes betrayed awe.

"I'm pretty sure I might love you, too," Harry said.

Draco kissed him. It hurt, and then it didn't anymore.

*

"So that's it? You just forgave him?"

"Yep," Harry said, finishing the final touches on his Potions essay. He frowned at a misspelling but then shrugged. It was Slughorn, not Snape.

"I think Draco earned it," Hermione said, snatching up Harry's essay and correcting the error and likely a few more.

"You just like the way Draco and Harry snog in front of you," Ron grumbled.

"We don't snog in front of anyone!"

Everyone in the common room fell silent, and Harry could practically *feel* the raised eyebrows. "All right," he conceded. "But not for the thrill of it or anything. It just happens!"

"I don't mind, Harry," Hermione said, patting Harry on the arm. Her eyes were bright.

Ron groaned. "Whatever. If he hurts you again, I'll kill him."

Harry shifted. "Ron, he's probably going to. Not on purpose or anything. But... people just do that to each other sometimes. I don't mean the physical stuff, but... when you love someone, sometimes it hurts you *and* them." Harry felt wiser than he had even that morning. He wouldn't put up with Draco pushing him around anymore, but he also didn't expect to never fight, never say hurtful things, never push each other away at times. He was okay with that. As long as they had each other, they'd get through it all. Together. Harry smiled at his own sappiness.

"I'm for bed," he announced. He wanted to get up to the room for a wank before everyone else filed up. He and Draco had made another addition to their growing library kiss collection, but Draco had stopped Harry before things could get too far, even turning down the offer of a romp in the Room of Requirement. He couldn't remember ever being more sexually frustrated.

"Night, Harry," Hermione said, handing back his essay. He nodded his thanks to her.

"Just make sure Draco knows I'll be watching him," Ron said, but he smiled at Harry to show he was...mostly...kidding.

"He'll be thrilled to hear it."

Instead of watching Ron try to figure out whether that was a sexual innuendo, Harry went up to his dorm room, revelling in the rare privacy.

Unfortunately, he'd barely gotten out of his pants before Neville came in, yawning widely and giving Harry a sleepy smile as he crashed face-first on his bed. He was snoring in minutes.

Sighing, Harry debated between just going through with his plan or getting some sleep. He felt tired enough that he ended up going to sleep, curling up beneath his covers, sequestered by the bed curtains, and thinking of Draco.

He woke up to a sudden silence.

In a room full of boys, who naturally made all sorts of noises, even when asleep, absolute silence was unfamiliar enough to jolt Harry from even a deep sleep. He didn't jerk awake, his body reverting back to nights spent in a tent. Letting awareness come to him slowly, Harry knew he wasn't alone.

A cool hand pressed against his bare chest. "It's me," the voice said unhelpfully, but Harry knew it was Draco.

A small bead of light spilled from Draco's all-too familiar wand. Draco saw Harry looking at it and smiled.

"Never did thank you for sending it back, did I?"

"Of course you didn't," Harry said, grinning. He pulled back the covers, and Draco burrowed under, leaning over Harry.

"Thanks for not burning it," Draco said seriously. He kissed Harry softly.

"Thanks for... letting me borrow it."

Draco rolled his eyes. "I missed you, you know." His fingers teased Harry's stomach, circling his navel and dipping in.

Harry was very aware of the fact that he'd stripped down for that wank and hadn't dressed again. "I wasn't the one who turned down the Room of Requirement."

"This is better, isn't it? Your own bed?" Draco smiled. "Smells like you."

A little embarrassed having Draco in his own space like this, he asked, "How'd you get in?"

"I know someone who wants to see you happy."

Hermione. Harry chuckled, then covered his mouth with his hand.

"Don't worry," Draco said. "Silencing spells. I'm brilliant at them."

"Of course you are." Harry ran his hand down Draco's chest and tugged at the hem of his shirt, hinting strongly.

But Draco pulled back and reached over the side of the bed. He came back with a black box that he rested on Harry's stomach.

Recognising the chocolates he'd bought for Draco, Harry got into a sitting position, moving the box onto his lap. "These were for you," he said, disappointed that his gift hadn't turned out the way he'd wanted.

"I was hoping you'd say that," Draco said, his eyes apologising.

Harry handed it to him.

Taking back the box, Draco touched it reverently, as if he hadn't already seen it. "Why?" he asked softly.

"Because I wanted to. Because, at the time, you deserved it." Harry softened his words with a kiss.

Draco gave the silver ribbon a tug, then looked at Harry, who nodded for him to continue. Unravelling the gift, Draco lifted the lid.

"Harry, these are..." Draco seemed to recognise the chocolates, though there was no label or anything. He looked at Harry with wide, shocked eyes.

Feeling shy, Harry shrugged. He grabbed a chocolate at random and offered it to Draco, who took it carefully, licking Harry's finger. Draco's eyes practically rolled back as he chewed, and he made obscene noises that were not at all out of place in a bed.

With a steadying breath, Harry took the box and replaced the lid, leaving it on the nightstand. He pushed Draco onto his back and straddled him, feeling lascivious for being naked when Draco was fully clothed. Pressing his growing erection down against Draco's groin, he draped his body over Draco and kissed him.

"Mmm," he murmured. "You taste good."

"I was worried the chocolate would cover it up," Draco quipped, his eyes going dark as Harry circled his hips.

"Been a while since we..." Harry bit his lip. Did Draco even want to?

"You want to?"

"If you do."

Draco pulled Harry down, arms thrown around him. "I want to. Very, very much. I thought you didn't because I hurt you."

"It did hurt, but that just means you'll just have to be gentle with me," Harry said.

"I promise, little mate."

Harry let Draco sit up to take off his shirt and then squirmed down his body to divest him of his trousers and pants. He was on Draco again in seconds, moaning as their bodies came into full contact. He kissed Draco hard, enjoying being on top for once. He could still taste chocolate, and it would be forever changed for him.

Reaching under his pillow for the lubricant he'd gotten out earlier, he pressed it into Draco's hand. He tried not to blush, but it was hard.

He noticed Draco's hand was shaking as he slicked his fingers. Harry moved up a little so Draco could reach between Harry's legs to where he wanted him most.

Harry gasped a little when the cool wetness touched him, but Draco's fingers warmed him. He resumed the kissing, keeping his hands in Draco's hair as he moved his lips, tasting and teasing.

"Ready," Harry said, panting as he broke the kiss.

Draco lubed his cock and let Harry take over. With Draco's eyes on his, Harry felt not just naked but *bare*. He lowered himself down, groaning at the stretch. Draco was shaking with the effort not to move, his hands gripping Harry's waist.

"So good," Harry whispered, sinking down. With his arse pressed against Draco's hips, everything fell into place. Finally, things were as they were supposed to be.

"Gods, yes," Draco said, thrusting up a little. "No pain?"

"No pain," Harry confirmed. He leaned over, bracing his hands on Draco's chest as Draco touched him everywhere. There was love in the touch; Harry could feel it.

When Harry began to move, everything else fell away. There was no room full of boys. There was no school, even. No world that would be hard and uncomprehending of what they had.

Draco's hand moved over Harry's claim mark, long healed and responsive only to him. The burst of pleasure was muted; his mind was his own. No white fog made things easier. Draco was beneath him, barely restrained and beautiful, eyes that refused to blink as he took in Harry's face. Draco, who was demanding and scary at times; Draco, who was beautiful and could be cold. Draco, who was his.

Harry's orgasm surprised him; he hadn't wanted things to end. But as he cried out, as Draco groaned and jerked his hips one last time, he knew things hadn't ended. There was so much more. He'd be an Auror and Draco would be whatever he wanted, and they'd buy a house together, whatever Draco wanted, and they'd hold hands and do this *all the time*.

And Harry would never be alone. And Draco would never suffer. And they'd just... be in love.

"Thanks for the gift," Draco said, pulling Harry against his chest after they'd caught their breath.

Harry kissed him. If Draco meant more than just the chocolates, he didn't let on. But Harry knew.

The End.